# REVELATION AND LEARNING--A CORRELATION

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by

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# INTRODUCTION

At various times through Christian history revelation has been the focus of strong theological and hortatory interest. At other times while some matters of content (certain historic events, Scripture, etc.) have been regarded as revealed, revelation itself has been largely ignored. There has been in recent years an increase in awareness of the significance of revelation as a process by which truth or understanding is communicated or realized. The focus of interest has been less upon the propositional content of revelation than upon the nature of the experience by which it is apprehended and the differences it makes in human life.

It is the purpose of this paper to correlate contemporary understandings of revelation with learning and learning theory by attempting to demonstrate the relation of both to perception, and to note implications and applications of this for Christian education.

We shall note briefly how revelation has been conceived in the past, then consider recent thought concerning revelation, particularly that of H. Richard Niebuhr, Henry Nelson Wieman, and Gerhard Ebeling. Niebuhr and Ebeling appear to have much in common. Both evidence a strong flavor of an existentialist philosophical position; both have great interest in history (Ebeling is a church

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historian as well as a theologian); both are practical-minded in their theological concern--Niebuhr having devoted his professional life primarily to Christian social ethics, Ebeling deeply concerned with the field of hermeneutics; Ebeling is a continental theologian; Niebuhr an American, has nevertheless been instrumental as a mediator of European thought in this country. Wieman distinctively represents the American scene. He considers himself an empirical theologian and espouses a neo-naturalistic philosophical position. He makes every effort to interpret religion in terms consistent with contemporary scientific thought and methodology.

The nature of perception, as psychology understands it, will then be considered and the intimacy of its relation to learning and the recognition of this in various learning theories will be noted. Insights from contemporary thinking about revelation will be compared with aspects of the process of perception to indicate how revelation may be conceived of as a type of perceptual learning. Finally, the correlation of revelation and learning through perception will be related to Christian education theory and practice.



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# CHAPTER I

## THE BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT CONCERNING REVELATION

### I. THE EXPERIENCE OF REVELATION

E. F. Scott has stated, "The idea of revelation answers to an instinctive knowledge on man's part that there is a sphere of being which he cannot himself discover."[1] This subjective awareness of an objectivity which seems capable of being known only as it discloses itself has been a foundation for the notion of revelation--and even of religion itself--from earliest times.

Man is usually conscious--to some extent, at least--of his own intellectual efforts, particularly when he makes what he regards as a profound observation or arrives at a significant conclusion. But there are experiences of realization or awareness, usually having to do with deep religious meanings, which seem to force themselves upon him, or which he cannot fully account for in terms of his own reasoning processes. As Raymond E. Gibson says, speaking of revelation in the Christian context:

> It is impossible for logic by itself to lead to the Holy God. Reason does not define or exhaust the

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[1]Ernest Findley Scott, The New Testament Idea of Revelation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 17.

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> meanings of the Incarnation or the Atonement. Reason is not adequate to deal with much that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Thought and speculation alone cannot state with any completeness what it is to stand in a God-relationship. All this is really known in the event of revelation when one stands before the divine unveiling, and then God is known in personal encounter rather than by intellectual or conceptual recognition.[2]

## II. REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

In the Old Testament revelation is generally presented as divine self-disclosure, God's action in offering himself in friendship and personal relationship, or in covenant relationship with Israel as a people, not as the communication of knowledge about God nor the stimulation of states of feeling to achieve mystic unity with him.

> The revelation can indeed give rise to knowledge and is necessarily accompanied by numinous feelings; yet it does not itself consist in these things but is quite essentially the action of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in friendship.[3]

Nathan Söderblom has contrasted the Old Testament "revealed" religion with the more mystical, contemplative

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[2]Raymond E. Gibson, "'Onceness' and Process," Interpretation, XIV (October 1960), 403.

[3]Albrecht Oepke, "Καλύπτω . . ." in G. Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), III, 575; quoted in John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 27.

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religions in India.[4] The striking distinction between these religions is suggested by the "discourses" of Indian religion, which eventuate in a withdrawing, ascetic mysticism, and the prophetic "Thus saith the Lord" of Hebrew faith, which insistently beckons men to righteous and responsible living.[5] In both cases human activity is paramount, but the difference lies in its inception and motivation. In one instance, it is the human quest for God, through ascetic exercises and self-induced states; in the other it is human response to God's mighty self-revealing acts in history.

> The Bible does not supply psychological information as to how man is to treat himself, but tells him to see and experience what God has done and is doing, and to order his life thereafter.[6]

John Baillie points out, furthermore, that the revelation of which the Bible speaks is always of a personal nature. Though it may be mediated through historic events, nature, law, or other personalities, it is never merely the subjective interpretation of these facts but God's disclosure of himself. "It is not the revelation of an object to a subject," he says, "but a revelation

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[4]Nathan Söderblom, The Living God (London: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1939), pp. 264-316.

[5]Ibid., pp. 267 f. [6]Ibid., p. 305.

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from subject to subject, a revelation of mind to mind."[7]

The New Testament has been interpreted as a record of God's revelation of himself through his act of incarnation in Jesus. E. F. Scott sees this revelation in Christ to have been again largely a matter of "subject to subject" personal disclosure, not an intellectual offering and appropriation. He says,

> From the first . . . it was realized that the true message of Jesus did not consist either in his words or in the immediate thought conveyed in them. Ideas, even at the best, make their appeal to the intellect, and in faith thus produced there is no certainty. Where argument convinces, a contrary argument may destroy. The word of Jesus was with power, and it was this power which constituted the revelation. He could make men feel as they listened to him that God had come near, and that only the spiritual things were real. He changed the higher life into an actual possession, and this was the meaning in the last resort, of his revelation. Nothing is truly known until it is experienced. Love, sorrow, danger, despair, faith, liberty are the most familiar words in every language. All our lives we have heard and read and thought about them, and seem to know everything that they can mean. But in some great moment the thing itself comes into our life. It comes, we say, as a revelation; and when we thus express ourselves in our ordinary speech we are using the term "revelation" in its proper sense. A truth is revealed when it is realized.[8]

Scott further points out that Gnostic thought, which had no small influence on early Christian thinking, helped to bring to light an element of Jesus' teaching which might have been obscured by the transcendentalism of Hebrew

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[7]Baillie, op. cit., p. 24.

[8]Scott, op. cit., p. 104.

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thought--his emphasis on fellowship with God, or participation in the divine life.[9] This heightened the likelihood of interpreting revelation as personal self-disclosure, so well evidenced in Paul's Christ-mysticism as the channel of revelation.[10] Johannine thought extended this possibility by emphasizing the abiding and future unfolding of the experience of God in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.[11]

F. Gerald Downing questions whether Christianity has a revelation, whether God has revealed himself, whether the Bible really testifies to such a revelation.[12] He presents an extensive and penetrating examination of biblical writings and other literature contemporary to them, and convincingly demonstrates that ideas of revelation are of little prominence in the Bible. Most words contained therein which might be or have been interpreted as suggesting revelation, he shows, actually have a different or less "pretentious" meaning than this and, furthermore, these concepts appear but rarely.[13] The Hebrew words gelah, arah, and hasap, for instance, the

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[9] Ibid., p. 125.

[10] Ibid., pp. 128 ff.

[11] Ibid., pp. 182 ff.

[12] F. Gerald Downing, Has Christianity a Revelation? (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964).

[13] Ibid., pp. 20-125.

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most frequently used words which convey the sense of "reveal" or "uncover," are shown as being used to describe God's letting himself be seen as though materially visible (a theophany), or metaphorically of God's "open" activity, or of his imparting secret information about the future or of the structure of the physical world, etc. After extensive consideration of New Testament passages which might suggest revelation, Downing concludes that

> . . . its writers never clearly and explicitly say that 'God reveals himself (in Christ)', or that 'God has revealed himself' (Matt. 11:25 ff may be an exception). There are quite a few suggestions that we depend on God for our obedience to God (our 'knowledge of him'), our 'free obedience' as sons, not slaves. . . . But this is not 'knowledge of God himself'; nor do we depend for this knowledge-obedience or any 'self-revealing' by God.[14]

Undoubtedly much of our impression of there being a strong emphasis upon revelation in the Bible is but a reflection of much more recent thinking. Downing feels that words like "salvation" and "redemption" would be more suitable than "revelation" to use as descriptive of the theological significance of the historical events of the life, death, resurrection and glory of Jesus, and he is probably correct so far as the intent and understanding of New Testament writers is concerned. Yet is not their very awareness of this salutary significance of Christ's life

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[14] Ibid., p. 123.

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a demonstration of the fact and power of revelation?

Though he denies this, Downing seems to expect too much of revelation--that it be definitive, propositional, complete, final. He rejects revelation because of the ambiguities and uncertainties in what people have believed to be revelation. He writes,

> It is not that there is no possibility of giving positive content to the word 'God'; it is that even within 'the Christian tradition' there are too many possibilities. When one bundle of possibilities is chosen and called 'the revelation of God', this is only a disguised way of saying 'this has my allegiance; I commit myself here.' However we choose as Christians, we cannot claim that God has made the right choice at all generally plain. However plain we might like to say it must be, it is still not plain enough for most of us to 'see'. In this uncertainty there is no 'revelation'.[15]

## III. UNDERSTANDINGS OF REVELATION THROUGH THE YEARS OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

What Downing is really objecting to is the post-biblical understanding of revelation which shifted the focus from responsible subject-to-subject relationship to propositional knowledge, from performative to informative experience. Gnosticism undoubtedly was a significant factor in this shift, with its emphasis upon "knowing" brought close to the biblical "subject-to-subject" understanding of revelation by its techniques of mystical

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[15] Ibid., p. 238.

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appropriation. By late New Testament times and in the post-apostolic centuries theological disputation, particularly the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, helped to establish in Christian thought the centrality of the new revelation in Christ.[16] The effort to establish and preserve orthodoxy, which went along with these early controversies, led to an increasing identification of revelation not with the events recorded in scripture, but with the whole of scripture--and tradition--itself.[17]

The subtlety of this change in the understanding of revelation from the Old Testament focus upon divine self-disclosure through the recipient's own experience to the late New Testament association of revelation with "knowledge about" God is suggested by the comparisons, pointed out by Jean Danielou,[18] of the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) words for "truth" (which would be characteristic of whatever might be revealed). The Hebrew word is emet, the root of which refers to the solidarity of something from which one receives support--as a foundation pillar or a mother's arms. Danielou suggests "rock" as

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[16]Walter Marshall Horton, Christian Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 85.

[17]Baillie, op. cit., p. 29.

[18]Jean Danielou, God and the Ways of Knowing (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 106.

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being symbolic of what this understanding of truth means. In New Testament times the Greek alethia or Latin veritas were the words used to convey the concept of truth. Both of these suggest the transparency of a thing to the mind and may more appropriately be symbolized by "light."

The question of the nature of revelation was more-or-less obscured in the medieval period as the church became more preoccupied with problems of ecclesiology and heirarchy.[19] As the Reformation dawned, questions of personal, individual salvation--soteriology--were the burning theological issues and revelation remained as an accepted, not a disputed matter. Revelation was considered as one of two means of access to knowledge of God. Thomas Aquinas spoke of "an ascent, by the natural light of reason, through created things to the knowledge of God" and of "a descent, by the mode of revelation, of divine truth which exceeds the human intellect, yet not as demonstrated to our sight but as a communication delivered for our belief."[20] For Aquinas and those who followed him the latter gave access to divine understandings not accessible through the process of reason.

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[19]H. D. McDonald, Ideas of Revelation (1700-1860) (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 1.

[20]Thomas Aquinas, Summa contra Gentiles (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1923), IV, Chap. I, quoted in Baillie, op. cit., p. 4.

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After the Middle Ages one or the other of these avenues of approach to divine knowledge was usually emphasized; the Rationalists of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries relied almost wholly on reason, while the Protestant Reformers, suspicious of reason because of the corruption of human nature, placed their reliance on the revealed Word. Since the "Word" was usually identified with scripture in the later Reformation period, the consequences was what Barth describes as "a freezing up of the connection between scripture and revelation," and scripture itself too often became "a static sum of revealed propositions to be formed into a system like the paragraphs of a legal document."[21]

Soon three foci appeared about which clustered varied concepts of the relation between revelation and reason. On the one hand the Rationalists, who had raised the issue with the Deistic denial of a special revelation beyond creation, insisted reason was the only means of access to truth and God. A second group--the "orthodox" (represented by men like Bishop Butler and Samuel Clark)--adopted a rationalistic and objective approach to revelation, seeing "special" revelation (revealed religion) as being supported and authenticated by reason (natural

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[21]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: Clark, 1936), I, 142.

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religion), and denying that there is anything unreasonable or mysterious in genuine Christianity. "Sound common sense" lay at the roots of both of these opinions. A third position, however, was emerging among the "enthusiasts," who approached and evaluated revelation from a subjective standpoint, on the basis of the authority of the individual soul, of inner experience.[22] McDonald likens these three poles to political positions: the Deists, he says, made reason absolute sovereign; the "orthodox" made it a limited monarchy; and the "enthusiasts" were rabid republicans.[23]

Gradually during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries subjectivism emerged supreme as the seat of authoritative theological knowledge--whether this was termed "revelation" or not. The English Evangelicals, starting with an objective concept of the Bible as *in toto* the revealed Word of God, nevertheless stressed the fact that this revelation must be accompanied by a subjective illumination of the Spirit.[24] Continental Pietism influenced Kant to reject natural theology and, indeed, to "abolish knowledge to make room for faith"[25] on the premise

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[22]McDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-18.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 34. [24]*Ibid.*, pp. 196-242.

[25]Emmanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1877), Preface, quoted in Baillie, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

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that "the theoretical exercise of reason . . . cannot conduct us to any such knowledge of super-sensible reality as religion requires,"[26] though the faith at which he arrived was still a rational faith. Moving still further in this subjective direction was Schleiermacher for whom theology rests on neither authoritatively communicated truths nor on speculative reasoning, but on the religion's self-consciousness of the Christian community, which is essentially a feeling (rather than a cognition) of complete dependence on God.[27] In similar fashion Ritschl found the basis for theological knowledge in neither the objectivity of authoritatively communicated doctrine, nor that of reason, but in the "value-judgments of faith."[28]

Little use was made of the word or concept "revelation" by the above writers and others who followed in their train, due largely to the fact that the term had been so closely associated with cognition and consequent doctrine whereas the emphasis here was upon subjective expression as the basis for authoritative understanding. In the latter part of the nineteenth century there was revival of the use of this term, on the one hand by those disturbed by both Darwinian evolution and higher criticism

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[26]Baillie, op. cit., p. 10.

[27]Ibid., pp. 11 ff. [28]Ibid., pp. 14 f.

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of the Bible, which caused them to focus their attention upon the authority of the Scriptural revelation,[29] and on the other hand by those, particularly in England and Scotland, who sought to demonstrate either the unity or the complementary qualities of natural and revealed religion.[30]

The prevailing mood of these times is suggested by Sara Little who writes,

> When a word drops from the scene or declines in importance, the conclusion may logically be drawn that the reality symbolized by the word is no longer vital to mankind. That observation is applicable to the decline of the concern for revelation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period in which the Thomistic understanding of revelation was completely disrupted. . . . The scientific study of the Bible in higher criticism, the challenge to biblical authority by the authority of religious experience, as well as other factors, contributed to the disruption of the traditional belief that revealed, as distinct from natural, knowledge centered in the words of Scripture. Christianity as a religion among religions, could be understood by the tools of human reason. This era--in which "modern" religious education was born--was instituted by a revolution in man's perception of himself, the word, and God.[31]

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[29]H. D. McDonald, Theories of Revelation (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), pp. 8 ff.

[30]Baillie, op. cit., pp. 16 ff.

[31]Sara Little, "Revelation, the Bible and Christian Education" in Marvin J. Taylor (ed.), An Introduction to Christian Education (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1966), p. 43.

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## IV. CONTEMPORARY INTEREST IN REVELATION

Strangely enough, this revolution has brought about in theological circles a renewal of interest in revelation--and in its objective elements, though now almost always viewed with conscious regard for its subjective apprehension. John Baillie's treatment of revelation in recent thought points this up in three chapters emphasizing various aspects of this matter.

One chapter, entitled "The Mighty Acts of God,"[32] suggests the contemporary concern with the historical events by which God reveals himself--but focuses upon the interpretation of these events as being the crucial point in the process of revelation. William Temple's emphasis upon the coincidence of event and interpretation, the interaction of mind and event,[33] typifies this emphasis, which is also seen in Dodd's definition of history as "not merely occurrences, but . . . events which are occurrences plus meaning."[34]

"The Response to Revelation," another chapter in

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[32]Baillie, op. cit., pp. 62 ff.

[33]William Temple, Nature, Man and God (London: Macmillan, 1934), pp. 315, 499.

[34]C. F. Dodd, History and the Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 104; quoted in Baillie op. cit., p. 66.

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Baillie's book,[35] emphasizes the ways in which the one who receives revelation responds in trust and commitment, but such response is conditioned by the objective nature of revelation which calls for such response. "Every revelation of God is a demand," Temple says,[36] and Buber similarly states, "All revelation is summons and sending."[37]

Another chapter, "Scripture and Covenant,"[38] reflects the current emphasis upon the positive relation of Scripture and revelation. Scripture is not identified with revelation, yet its importance as a vehicle of revelation is recognized. "God's mighty acts," his revelations in historic events, find expression and conveyance only within and through particular cultures and cultural forms, yet these are subject to limitation, distortion, and error. Man must apply his critical faculties to the sacred writings--Christian and non-Christian--which attest revelatory events, the significance of which lies beyond the texts themselves.

In the twentieth century revelation is again a subject for serious consideration by theologians, but in

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[35]Baillie, op. cit., pp. 83 ff.

[36]Temple, op. cit., p. 254.

[37]Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 115.

[38]Baillie, op. cit., pp. 109 ff.

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terms of new understanding of its meaning--usually in keeping with (though sometimes in reaction to) trends of thought begun in the preceding century.

> The accent in our studies has moved from metaphysical to phenomenological thinking, from reason to feeling or function, from revelation to religious experience, from God to man, individual or society, or, what amounts to the same, from theology to anthropology, i.e., to man's effort at understanding himself.[39]

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[39] R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Revelation, Natural Theology and Comparative Religion," Hibbert Journal, LV (April 1957), 283.

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# CHAPTER II

## A DYNAMIC CONCEPT OF REVELATION--
## H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

### I. METANOIA AND REVELATION

H. Richard Niebuhr, whose book, The Meaning of Revelation, appeared in 1941, typifies in his view of the nature of revelation the twentieth century and its focus upon the subjective or human side of the religious equation. For him religion itself is to be understood in terms of its effects upon men, of the transformation and integration of life which it accomplishes. "Christianity," he says, "is 'permanent revolution' or metonia. . . ."[1] Again, he describes metanoia as "the reinterpretation of all our interpretations of life and death,"[2] with emphasis upon the commitment and consequent quality of life and selfhood derived from such "reinterpretation." He concludes, "This conversion and permanent revolution of our human religion through Jesus Christ is what we mean by revelation."[3]

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[1]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. iii.

[2]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 143.

[3]Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 191.

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In his study of revelation, Niebuhr approaches his subject taking into account the relativities of human society and experience. A quotation from another of his writings summarizes the varying relativities which he recognizes that we must acknowledge and their possible implications for us:

> The conclusions at which we arrive individually in seeking to be Christians in our culture are relative in at least four ways. They depend on the partial, incomplete, fragmentary knowledge of the individual; they are relative to the measure of his faith and his unbelief; they are related to the historical position he occupies and to the duties of his station in society; they are concerned with the relative value of things.
>
> . . . In the presence of their relativities men seem to have three possibilities: they can become nihilists and consistent skeptics who affirm that nothing can be relied upon; or they can flee to the authority of some relative position, affirming that a church, or a philosophy or a value, like that of life for the self, is absolute; or they can accept their relativities with faith in the infinite Absolute to whom all their relative views, values and duties are subject.[4]

Such faith in the "infinite Absolute" Niebuhr calls "radical faith," and relating revelation to this, declares, "Revelation specifies those events in which radical faith was elicited."[5] Still more explicitly, he defines

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[4]H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 234.

[5]H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943, 1960), p. 42.

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revelation as "an event which elicits the confidence of selves in their ultimate environment and calls upon them as free selves to decide for the universal cause."[6]

## II. OBJECTIVE ASPECTS OF REVELATION

The God who is revealed. Niebuhr's primary concern in considering revelation is with its objective side--the God who is revealed. His book on revelation concludes, climactically, with a major section on "The Deity of God." Earlier chapters are devoted to the more subjective aspects of our experience of revelation. (Here we reverse the order, since the focus in this study is more upon revelation as a process than upon that revealed by this process.)

Niebuhr is wary of the danger of absolutizing revelation itself or any other factor of experience which is relative to God, such as religion, church, or morality.[7] Such absolutizing denies the nature of revelation itself as well as the living reality of God.

> Whenever the revelation idea is used to justify the church's claims to superior knowledge or some other excellence, revelation is necessarily identified with something that the church can possess. Such possessed revelation must be a static thing and under the human control of the Christian community--a book, a creed, or a set of doctrines. It cannot be revelation in act whereby the church itself is convicted of its poverty,

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[6] Ibid., p. 47.

[7] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. iii.

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> its sin and misery before God. Furthermore, it cannot be the revelation of a living God; for the God of a revelation that can be possessed must be a God of the past, a God of the dead who communicated his truths to men in another time but who to all effects and purposes has now retired from the world, leaving the administration of his interests to some custodian of revelation--a church, a priesthood, or a school of theology.[8]

For Niebuhr revelation is not propositional but personal. He says, "We acknowledge revelation by no third person proposition, such as that there is a God but only in the direct confession of the heart, 'Thou art my God.'"[9] Because of this quality of the experience we call it "revelation" rather than "discovery" or "vision," he further states.[10] Knowledge of persons is gained by revelation. "Selves cannot be discovered as America was found by Columbus, by sailing in the direction of a secret and a guess; this new continent must come to us or remain unknown."[11]

Niebuhr acknowledges the difficulty of conceptualizing a God who is, as he calls him, the "infinite Absolute." But in revelation it is the selfhood of this God that we apprehend, "the one God who is being (who) is an 'I,' or like an 'I' who is faithful as only selves are faithful."[12] The experience of revelation is not a

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[8] Ibid., p. 41.
[9] Ibid., pp. 153 f.
[10] Ibid., p. 143.
[11] Ibid., p. 145.
[12] Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism . . . Culture, p. 45.

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reception of an intellectual disclosure of the essence of objective being, but a recognition and acknowledgment of the faithful, loyal, truthful reality of a "Thou."[13]

An important part of this apprehension for Niebuhr is our own awareness of the relationship of our selfhood to the selfhood of God. He says,

> Revelation means the moment in our history through which we know ourselves to be known from beginning to end, in which we are apprehended by the knower; it means the self-disclosing of the eternal knower. Revelation means the moment in which we are surprised by the knowledge of someone there in the darkness and the void of human life; it means the self-disclosure of light in our darkness. Revelation is the moment in which we find our judging selves to be judged not by ourselves or our neighbors but by one who knows the final secrets of the heart; revelation means the self-disclosure of the judge. Revelation means that we find ourselves to be valued rather than valuing and that all our values are transvaluated by the activity of a universal valuer.[14]

A brief and simple explanation of Niebuhr's understanding of God is provided when he attempts to define radical monotheism.

> "Radical monotheism," as I have tried to define it, is a form of human faith, that is, of the confidence and fidelity without which men do not live. It may, but need not, be expressed in verbalized beliefs. When the confidence is so put into words the resultant assertion is not that there is a God but that Being is God, or, better that the principle of being, the source of all things and the power by which they

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[13] Ibid., pp. 45 f.

[14] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 152 f.

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> exist, is good, as good for them and good to them. It is relied upon to give and conserve worth to all that issues from it. . . .[15]

Revelation through Jesus Christ. The dynamic nature of revelation as productive of revolution and reconstruction within the life of the person must be recognized if we are to understand what Niebuhr feels is the role of Jesus Christ in this process. Jesus is more than a conceptual tool or pattern which demonstrates and clarifies for us the qualities of God's nature. His life, death, and personality may be for us a dramatic implement, an image of such impelling strength that in its light we are able to understand and interpret the whole of life. Niebuhr writes,

> The special occasion to which we appeal in the Christian church is called Jesus Christ, in whom we see the righteousness of God, his power and wisdom. But from that special occasion we also derive the concepts which make possible the elucidation of all the events in our history. Revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible.[16]

Again he writes,

> . . . in Christian life Jesus Christ is a symbolic form with the aid of which men tell each other what life and death, God and man, are like; but even more he is a form which they employ as an a priori, an

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[15]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism . . . Culture, p. 38.

[16]Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 93.

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> image, a scheme or pattern in the mind which gives form and meaning to their experience. . . .
>
> Again Jesus Christ is the symbolic form with which the self understands itself, with the aid of which it guides and forms itself in its actions and its sufferings.[17]

In the experience of revelation-metanoia, the Christ figure functions for the individual as a symbol, but this does not beg the question of Jesus' historic actuality. Niebuhr points out that history may function as a symbol or myth whenever men use it to understand their present or future.[18] The Jesus who lived among men and the remarkable quality of his life, is the basis for the symbolic figure which illuminates existence for the Christian. Niebuhr appraises this confidence-inspiring life in these words:

> The greatness of his (Jesus') confidence in the Lord of heaven and earth as fatherly in goodness toward all creatures, the consistency of his loyalty to the realm of being, seem unqualified by distrust or by competing loyalty. This faith is expressed in acts of healing as well as in teaching, in his interpretation of the historic moment in which he lives and in the leadership he seeks to give to his people, in his relations to national enemies and to the morally rejected. His confidence and his fidelity are those of a son of God--the most descriptive term which Christians apply to him as they contemplate the faith of their Lord. The word of God as God's oath of fidelity became flesh in him in this sense that he was a man who single-mindedly accepted the assurance that the Lord of heaven and earth was wholly faithful to him and to all creatures, and who in response gave wholehearted loyalty to the realm of being.[19]

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[17]Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 154, 156.
[18]Ibid., p. 156.
[19]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism . . . Culture, p. 42.

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One word of caution Niebuhr raises, however, based on what has so often happened in both theology and popular piety. Recognition of the great significance of Jesus for the Christian church and faith must not induce us to "substitute the Lordship of Christ for the Lordship of God."[20] Even in the revelatory experience, he points out, it is not Jesus but God whom we meet.[21]

Revelation and History. A most important contribution to the understanding of revelation which Niebuhr has made is in his emphasis upon the significance of time and history, particularly "our" history, in the process and experience of revelation. As he sees it, history is not merely a series of static, serial events, consideration of which may provide us some enlightenment, but a living, on-going stream of experience in which is involved all our thinking, feeling, and expression. "We are in history," he says, "as the fish is in water, and what we mean by the revelation of God can be indicated only as we point through the medium in which we live."[22]

All our knowledge of reality is conditioned by our spatial-temporal point of view. The individual observer

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[20] Ibid., p. 59.

[21] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 45.

[22] Ibid., p. 48.

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must see things now, with his own eyes, interpret them in terms of his own past experiences and what he has learned of others' experiences, and express these understandings in a language he has inherited. Niebuhr writes,

> The patterns and models we employ to understand the historical world may have had a heavenly origin, but as we know and use them they are, like ourselves, creatures of history and time; though we direct our thought to eternal and transcendant beings, it is not eternal and transcendent; though we regard the universal, the image of the universal in our mind is not a universal image.[23]

Revelation is religious insight, an interpretation of religious experience (or a religious interpretation of experience), but "religious and moral experiences are always in some history and in some social setting that derives from the past," says Niebuhr. "They also offer us no way of avoiding the use of our history in saying what we mean."[24]

Revelation is also an individual's experience. Niebuhr notes how each of us is conditioned by his own position in society and history.

> . . . Our historical relativism affirms the historicity of the subject even more than that of the object; man, it points out, is not only in time but time is in man. Moreover and more significantly, the time that is in man is not abstract but particular and concrete; it is not a general category of time but rather the time of a definite society with distinct

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[23] Ibid., p. 10. [24] Ibid., p. 53.

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> language, economic and political relations, religious faith and social organization.[25]

This particular time, society and history in which we participate--and especially as it relates to faith--Niebuhr calls "our history." Members who share this "internal" history have a different perspective upon its events than uninterested spectators might have if they viewed the same succession of events. Some of the differences in the perspectives of "external" as opposed to "internal" history which he suggests are: emphases upon individuality vs. personality; pure reason vs. practical reason; descriptive vs. normative differentiations; valuations in terms of strength vs. quality; time seen quantitatively, serially, a dimension of the external space-world vs. time as duration, a dimension of our life and our community; and human association seen in terms of atomic individuals related to each other by external bonds as opposed to a community of selves so internally related that their relationships are integral to their selfhood.[26]

Faith is a product of such "inner history," and revelation is the instrument of its creation. "Revelation means for us that part of our inner history which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible."[27]

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[25] Ibid., p. 13. [26] Ibid., pp. 59 ff.

[27] Ibid., pp. 63-70.

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Faith results from this illumination as the self, guided by significant factors of its inner history, finds its place in the total divine scheme of things. Niebuhr says,

> The standpoint of faith, of a self directed toward gods or God, and the standpoint of practical reason, of a self with values and with a destiny, are not incompatible; they are probably identical. To be a self is to have a god; to have a god is to have a history, that is, events connected in a meaningful pattern; to have one God is to have one history. God and the history of selves in community belong together in inseparable union.[28]

Niebuhr notes how certain factors, often considered as revelatory, require interpretation through "our-history" if they are to be revelatory.

> Nature regarded through our history is indeed a symbol of what we mean, a pointer to God; but nature uninterpreted through our history and our faith, or torn out of their context and placed in another, does not indicate what we mean.[29]

The same is true of the Scriptures, which provide no revelatory insight "save as we interpret them in a community in which men listen for the word of God in the reading of the Scripture, or in which men participate in the same spiritual history out of which the record came."[30] Of the

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[28] Ibid., p. 80. [29] Ibid., p. 49.

[30] Ibid., p. 51. In his introduction to Niebuhr's The Responsible Self James M. Gustafson offers the following explanation of Niebuhr's understanding of the role of the Bible in Christian ethics. The Bible's authority, for Niebuhr, he states, lies not in its infallibility but in its "truthfulness." ". . . the Bible is a dependable, reliable, honest, truthful witness to the life of men before God. Thus it can be a useful, but changing director of the

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Scriptures Niebuhr says significantly, "a history that was recorded forward, as it were, must be read backwards through our history if it is to be understood as revelatory."[31]

It should be our endeavor, nevertheless, Niebuhr says, to find revelatory significance in all events. We must, he states,

> regard all events, even though (we) can see most of them only from an external point of view, as workings of the God who reveals himself. . . . Faith having apprehended the divine self in its own history, can and must look for the manifestation of the same self in all other events.[32]

## III. REVELATION VIEWED SUBJECTIVELY

Imagination and Reason. When Niebuhr speaks of revelation he usually has reference to the Christ-event, though, as we have seen, he feels any event may have revelatory significance. The focus of his interest, however, is not with these events as events, but in their effects upon those who find them revelatory. Revelation, though having a definite nominative reference, has more the sense of a

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thought and action of the Christian community. . . . One can therefore speak of its educational authority. It is like the role of the teacher, which is to lead to a direct relationship of the student to the more ultimate authority of reality that the teacher mediates." It also has a "corroborative authority"--constituting a "court of validation for the judgments and actions of the Christian community and its members." Its unique authority for the Christian community lies in its being the record of the faith as nowhere else found. "It bears the authority of God's disclosure of himself." (pp. 23 f.)

[31] Ibid., p. 93. [32] Ibid., pp. 86 f.

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verb as Niebuhr uses it. His is a dynamic concept of the word.

The immediate product or effect of revelation upon the individual is "the discovery of rational pattern" in life.[33] The revelatory event is "that special occasion which provides us with an image by which all the occasions of personal life and common life become intelligible. . . ."[34] Drawing on the insights of psychology, Niebuhr sees revelation as providing us with the images and symbols the mind needs adequately to integrate and interpret the many facets of experience. He writes,

> We are far more image-making and image-using creatures than we usually think ourselves to be and, further, . . . our processes of perception and conception, of organizing and understanding the signs that come to us in our dialogue with the circumambient world, are guided and formed by images in our minds. Our languages, we are reminded, are symbolic systems. . . . With the aid of these systems we distinguish and relate our pasts, presents and futures; we divide up the world of nature into apprehendable, graspable entities; we relate these to each other in patterns that are intelligible and somehow manageable.[35]

Again, he writes, "the jostling mob of confused, unintelligible, meaningless visual and auditory sensations is made to march in order by a mind which approaches and apprehends them with some total image."[36] Indeed, our intellectual nature impels us to such an ordering.

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[33] Ibid., p. 94. [34] Ibid., p. 109.

[35] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 151 ff.

[36] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 96.

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> The heart must reason; the participating self cannot escape the necessity of looking for pattern and meaning in its life and relations. It cannot make a choice between reason and imagination but only between reasoning on the basis of adequate images and thinking with the aid of evil imaginations. Neither the primitive images of animism nor the impersonal patterns of modern scientific, or indeed of any kind of purely contemplative, thought supply a basis for the rational understanding of the self in its community and history. But there is an image neither evil nor inadequate which enables the heart to understand. The event through which that image is given them Christians call revelation.[37]

This image is the symbolic image of Christ, noted earlier (p. 23). The "event" through which this image is presented to us is that cluster of events focusing about his life and death. While other events may also be revelatory of God's being, revelation itself is unitary, testifying to the one, saving, integrating factor at the heart of the universe and of experience.

Niebuhr speaks of progressive revelation, but it is progressive only in the subjective sense that "it is progressively validated in the individual Christian life as ever new occasions are brought under its light, as sufferings and sins, as mercies and joys are understood by its aid."[38] Revelation can also be progressive, he says, in the sense of a dialectic from the revelatory moment to experience and back again.[39]

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[37] Ibid., pp. 108 f. [38] Ibid., p. 132.

[39] Ibid., p. 136.

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Niebuhr's understanding of that which is revealed--the one, saving, integrating factor at the heart of the universe and of experience--may be suggested by this quotation:

> When Christians refer to Jesus Christ as the revelation of God they do not or ought not have less than the three notes of faith in mind, the note that the valuing, saving power in the world is the principle of being itself (God is nothing less than being); that the ultimate principle of being gives and maintains and establishes worth (being is God, namely, valuer and savior); that they have been called upon to make the cause of God their cause.[40]

Metanoia. This call to respond by making the cause of God one's own cause is an integral part of the content and experience of revelation. The cause looms larger in revelation than the mediator of that revelation. Niebuhr writes,

> Even when I find that I can be responsible in the church only as I respond to Jesus Christ, I discover in him one who points beyond himself to the cause to which he is faithful and in faithfulness to which he is faithful to his companions. . . .[41]

Response to this call produces metonia, constant transformation, continuous conversion, permanent revolution.

Since the revelation is basically a revelation of

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[40]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism . . . Culture, p. 43. (Parenthetical statements are also quotations from Niebuhr, same page and context, though from another sentence.)

[41]Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 86.

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the steadfast selfhood, the "personlike integrity" of the principle of being, or God, the initial response, when the response is adequate, is in terms of developing integrated selfhood on the part of the respondee.[42] The emergence of a free self, capable of responding is the first response.

The continuing response, then, is a reasoning one, the responsible exercise of the self's highest capability. Niebuhr says,

> . . . revelation is no substitute for reason; the illumination it supplies does not excuse the mind from labor; but it does give to that mind the impulsion and the first principles it requires of it is to be able to do its proper work.[43]

Such reasoning, however, eventuates in a radical faith, constituted of trust in God as the value-center, and loyalty to his cause,[44] which finds expression in all the roles and relations of the self.[45]

In The Responsible Self, Niebuhr describes how the self develops in its relationships in society. Recognizing the fundamental social nature of the self--"that it is a being which not only knows itself in relation to other

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[42]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism . . . Culture, p. 47.

[43]Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 109.

[44]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism . . . Culture, p. 16.

[45]Ibid., p. 48.

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selves but exists as a self only in that relation"[46]--he notes another figure, personal yet referring to something which transcends the personal, to which the self relates. We respond to our companions in society, in the church, etc., but in any significant social grouping we also respond to a symbolic, imaginative figure or figures (usually historically based) which somehow represents the common cause. For United States democratic patriots this transcendent reference group might be the founding fathers; for Christians it may be the prophets and apostles, or Jesus Christ himself. The self "lives in presence of and response to . . . a Thou who is not an isolated event but symbolic in his particularity of something general and constant."[47]

Here again Niebuhr is recognizing the significant role of the image in the reasoning process. An image drawn from "our history" is an important factor in the integration and development of the self in its relationships. Revelation, as we have seen, utilizes such an image (possibly the same image) as a crucial factor in the interpretation and establishment of the relationship of the self to the whole of life and society.

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[46]Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 69.

[47]Ibid., p. 79.

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Such social relationships are formalized in terms of moral law, but the revelation of the person of God in Jesus Christ places the moral law in a new light. Niebuhr says, ". . . revelation is the beginning of the revolutionary understanding and appreciation of the moral law rather than the giving of a new law."[48] More explicitly he states, "The conversion of the imperative into an indicative and of the law whose content is love into a free love of God and man is the possibility which we see through revelation."[49] With such conversion, not only of the understanding but of conduct as well, and with the self attaining a new and lasting center in faith in and loyalty to the principle and cause of being, metanoia is accomplished.

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[48] Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 172.

[49] Ibid., p. 170.

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## CHAPTER III

## CREATIVE COMMUNICATION--HENRY NELSON WIEMAN

Elements at the heart of Henry Nelson Wieman's understanding of revelation and indications of the difficulties of comprehending these if one approaches the matter from the standpoint of traditional modes of thought are suggested in an interchange between Wieman and one who criticized his views of revelation. In his "Reply to Casserly" Wieman wrote,

> My critic says that I do not recognize revelation. Here, again, he is quite mistaken. But he does not state the problem correctly. He says that religion is response to revelation. He should say that a worthy religion is man's response not to revelation but to the living God revealed. If you begin by saying, with Casserly, that "God . . . confronted man with revelation," rather than by saying that God himself entered the process of human life, you become involved in confusion. It is the same difficulty arising from . . . a metaphysics and a language unfitted to say what must be said.[1]

The focus upon God revealed rather than upon revelation itself, the conception of God as part of the process of human life rather than standing outside that process is confrontation with man and the life process, and impatience with traditional metaphysics and theological language are

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[1]Henry Nelson Wieman, "Reply to Casserly," in Robert V. Bretall (ed.), The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 328.

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characteristic of Wieman. He is the great exponent of the neo-naturalist position which looks upon the world as self-explanatory, needing no transcendental principle to explain it,[2] yet which is keenly aware of God's role in it. God is to be found within the natural order, and is a process among the processes or events which constitute that order, but one with an enduring structure which distinguishes his character from that of other processes. His transcendence is not noumenal or independent, but arises out of his immanence in the world of events.[3] Such understandings do call for other than traditional metaphysical and theological styles of expression.

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[2]Cf. Wieman's comments in Henry Nelson Wieman, Douglas Clyde Macintosh and Max Carl Otto, Is There a God? (Chicago: Willet, Clark, 1937), p. 201; "The notion of a power back of existence is inherited from a time when it was thought existence was made up of inert atoms that had to be pushed and pulled around to get anything done. It can be traced still further back to the persistent notion that all characteristics of existence must inhere in an underlying substance. But that way of thinking is rapidly falling from repute. We do not think of existence as passive, requiring a power back of it to make it go. Existence is dynamic. Dynamic means that it is its nature to go, to stream, to change, to move on, to operate. Hence to say existence is a process or dynamic means precisely that there is not something back of it to make it go."

[3]Cf. Bernard M. Loomer, "Neo-naturalism and Neo-orthodoxy," Journal of Religion, XXXVIII:12, (April 1948), 80 ff.

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## I. CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION

Reconstruction. As in the case of Niebuhr, Wieman views revelation as dynamic. He says it "must be a creative transformation of human life occuring under such conditions that men become aware of the transforming power."[4]

It is most certainly "not to be identified with any set of doctrines or beliefs or propositions of any kind."[5] It "provides no access to truth beyond the bounds of observation, agreement of observers, and coherence. Revelation, in itself is not knowledge at all, although it may open the way to knowledge."[6] Again, he says, "The revelation of God in Christ is not any metaphysical system or speculative ontology about this transforming power. The revelation is the transforming power itself."[7]

> Revelation is the self-disclosure of the living reality of God; but no set of propositions can be identified with the living reality of God. God is much more than a true statement. . . .
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> . . . If it should be granted that Deity is

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[4]Henry Nelson Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 27.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Henry Nelson Wieman, The Source of Human Good (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 214.

[7]Henry Nelson Wieman, "Reply to My Critics," Religion in Life, XXXII:3 (Summer 1963), 461.

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> incarnate in Jesus Christ, this could not be a revelation to men unless it was at the same time a creative transformation of human life branching out from Jesus to his associates and from them to others in widening circles and onward to later generations. If this is revelation, then revelation cannot be a set of true propositions, otherwise called doctrines, about a divine life incarnate on earth. The revelation of God must be and can only be the very process of human life undergoing transformation in such a way that it saves man from evil and endows him with the greatest good. Unless one experiences this process of transformation in himself 'the power of God unto salvation' has not been revealed to him. The historic Jesus can be the revelation of God only in the sense that his process of saving transformation speaks from Jesus down through the ages from man to man and group to group by way of the church and the Holy Spirit.[8]

The nature of this transformation, as Wieman describes it, is not sudden or dramatic. He does not rule-out this possibility, but since the process involved is one of sharing, of mutuality, of personal interchange (as we shall see), as well as a complex growing process, this likelihood is extremely small or would represent but a portion of the process. Wieman speaks instead of "a continuous creativity which reconstructs every state of existence to expand (men's) horizons continuously,"[9] and goes on to indicate the senses in which this takes place:

> 'Expanding horizons' is a poetic term and requires more precise specifications. The term as here used means: (1) expanding the range of what one can know;

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[8]Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, pp. 27 f.

[9]Henry Nelson Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), p. 2.

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(2) expanding the range of what one can control; (3) more important than either of the two just mentioned, expanding the range of what one can appreciate as good and distinguish as evil; (4) most important of all, expanding in depth and scope one's appreciative understanding of himself and of the unique individuality of other persons and peoples.[10]

In another place Wieman lists another four pictures, related but different, of this creative transformation.

1. This creativity is an expanding of the range and diversity of what the individual can know, evaluate and control.

2. It is an increasing of one's ability to understand appreciatively other persons and peoples across greater barriers of estrangement and hostility.

3. It is an increasing of the capacity of the individual to integrate into the uniqueness of his own individuality a greater diversity of experiences so that more of all that he encounters becomes a source of enrichment and strength rather than impoverishing and weakening him.

4. It is an increasing of the freedom of the individual when freedom means one's ability to absorb any cause acting on one's self so that the consequences resulting from it express the character and fulfil the purpose of the individual himself.[11]

The Transforming Power. Wieman says that

God . . . is revealed when the process of transformation saving men from evil and to the greater good appears in such conspicuous and obvious form that it cannot be missed except by those who base their ultimate security upon mistaken beliefs about it.[12]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Henry Nelson Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," Journal of Religion, XXXVIII (January 1968), 25.

[12] Ibid., p. 26.

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Perhaps the most significant thing about this statement is that Wieman is saying that God, the transforming power, who is thus revealed, is this process of transformation and is revealed as such. God is not a power lying behind the transformation, but is the transforming process itself and is revealed in that process.

While it takes place at the level of human experience, this process is not simply human, for it transforms and re-creates human purpose and plan. Wieman says, ". . . the divine creativity is transcendent because it is not the product of human mind; rather the human mind and its world are the product of this creativity."[13] Wary of making statements that suggest anything supernatural about God, Wieman yet feels clear recognition of the more-than-human quality of this transforming process is required, and he states that it is

> not supernatural unless by this term one means that it is a manifestation in human life of a Being whose total character is beyond the reach of human understanding and which confronts us with a mystery so deep that the human mind can never penetrate it very far.[14]

Nonetheless, this transforming power is realized and experienced in human and other relationships, in "creative interchange" or "creative communion." God is present as

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[13]Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 22.

[14]Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 28.

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the reality and power there actualized whenever such interchange takes place--but not as a person except metaphorically. Wieman writes,

> This creativity is not a person for the very good reason that it works at the deepest roots of human personality to create, sustain, save and transform it as no person could ever do. . . . Certainly most people will symbolize this saving power in personal terms and do so quite properly because no better symbol is available to them.[15]

Wieman speaks of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but it is significant that in such references he nearly always includes the fellowship of Jesus--his disciples, the early church, the continuing fellowship, etc. He sees the revelation as not that of a person or through a person, but in a quality of relationship and fellowship demonstrated by Jesus and his followers. Wieman writes,

> In Jesus and his early fellowship I think that we see the kind of interchange which I have identified with the saving and transforming power at work in human life and which should be called God, because it does save by transforming man as he cannot transform himself. In Jesus and his fellowship this kind of interchange appears in a form so conspicuous that none can miss it except those driven by the need of personal security to believe that God must be a supernatural Being and not a natural process of interchange.[16]

Wieman feels that the revelation of God in Jesus was not exclusive, or even unique, except in a unique convergence of circumstances that gave it particular

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[15] Ibid., pp. 28 f.

[16] Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," p. 26.

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prominence. He says,

> This saving power is revealed in Jesus not necessarily because it is more powerfully present in his fellowship than anywhere else in history. It is obvious and conspicuous in that fellowship because of the way historical developments have lifted that fellowship to a mountaintop, so to speak. All subsequent ages in Western culture can see and feel this transforming power in Jesus and his early followers because of the social and psychological conditions then and there prevailing, combined with the way great streams of social development converged upon, and radiated from, that time and place. In this sense it can be said that history has made Jesus the revelation of God to Western man.[17]

Wieman, in fact, is deeply disturbed that some seeking to protect a supposed uniqueness in this particular revelation, deny the validity of knowledge gained through historical, psychological or other research that might help us understand and appropriate the saving power.[18]

## II. INSIGHT OR INTUITION

"God in the form of creativity reveals himself by rising to observable dominance over counter processes. Thus revelation demands empirical inquiry and cannot be effective without it,"[19] says Wieman, defending the relevance of sense experience to revelation and obviously also acknowledging the involvement of mental processes in

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[17] Ibid., pp. 26 f. [18] Ibid., p. 27.

[19] Henry Nelson Wieman, "Reply to (R. C.) Miller," in Brettall, op. cit., p. 42.

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the experience or awareness of revelation. There is, of course, nothing remarkable in this involvement, but Wieman does make significant observations about revelation and knowledge, epistemological theory, and ways in which different types and aspects of mental processes operate to facilitate creativity.

One of Wieman's most passionate concerns is with the application of scientific procedure--methods of observation and reason--in the quest for God and religious knowledge. Not only is he convinced that "scientific procedures give us more intelligent access to God,"[20] but he also senses the critical importance of having and using descriptive knowledge in a day when science and technology are instruments of supreme power and their direction and control are ultimately the responsibility of morality and religion.[21] Reason, which Wieman "most simply defines as the method of analysis, observation, inference, prediction, experiment, and logical coherence"[22] must be utilized in the religious quest.

> Knowledge, fallible as it may be, is the best guide we have in making decisions and in the ultimate commitment of faith. Yet the very expression "commitment of faith" suggests to most people a commitment not guided

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[20]Wieman in his Is There A God?, p. 198.

[21]Wieman, "Reply to My Critics," p. 470.

[22]Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 138.

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> by knowledge. This identification of faith with belief which is not knowledge is the mounting danger threatening the world community with disaster.[23]

As we have seen, Wieman is very emphatic in declaring that "revelation in itself is not knowledge at all, although it may open the way to knowledge."[24] Propositions and statements supposedly validated by some sort of revelation must be subjected to the same tests of reason as any other proposition.

> No appeal to divine revelation in Christ or the Bible or the church or the Judeo-Christian tradition can save us from idolatry when the appeal is made to evade the demand for vigorous and passionate inquiry to discover just what is true and what is false in all the statements attributed to Christ, Bible, church and tradition. Even if it should be granted that in Christ the whole saving reality which answers the religious questions can be found, still any statement which we make about this saving reality and interpretation of symbols referring to this saving reality of Christ are the statements and interpretations of our fallible minds. Until we have subjected these statements and interpretations to the vigorous tests of inquiry, we have arrogantly refused to seek the reality and have insisted instead that our ultimate commitment be given to these affirmations of our own minds which, since they have not been rigorously tested are much more likely to be in error than those which have been.[25]

It might be said that revelation, or what we feel may be revelation, provides not knowledge but hypotheses to be tested and expanded upon by the scientific procedures

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[23] Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," p. 14.

[24] Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 214.

[25] Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," pp. 22 f.

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we use for any verification. Wieman says,

> Revelation is the conspicuous presence of the saving power in human life. Knowledge of what this power is, how it operates, what conditions must be present in order for it to operate most effectively--all this must be discovered by the social sciences, including the kind of knowledge going by the name of "common sense."[26]

Though the process of arriving at knowledge may not be, and in most instances is not, a conscious, formal one, we do so by a series of steps which, formalized and made "scientific," Wieman outlines in this fashion:

> 1. We have an insight, variously called "hypothesis," "theory," or "innovating suggestion."
>
> 2. We put this suggestion into the form of a statement with terms unambiguously defined.
>
> 3. We develop the implications of this statement into a logical structure of propositions of such sort that some of these propositions specify what must be observed under required conditions if the statement is to be accepted as knowledge.
>
> 4. We make the observations under the specified conditions to discover if the data do appear in the order required to warrant accepting the statement as having met the tests of probability.[27]

According to Wieman's understanding, the process which provides or creates the insights and intuitions which initiate this cognitive action is revelatory. When God as creative interchange and transformation is conspicuously present in this process, Wieman would term it "revelation." This, however, is a matter of degree and

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[26] Ibid., p. 27. [27] Ibid., p. 13.

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not quality. The creation of insights or intuitions, whether or not they are sufficiently remarkable to be called revelations, is a process of divine creativity. In fact, Wieman feels that the outstanding characteristic of such creativity is just this generation of insights.[28]

Two elements appear as essential in Wieman's view of intuition or insight (he uses these terms interchangeably). One is innovation or radical originality, the other integration.

Innovation is largely a result of communication, as the role of language in the creation of insight suggests. Here is the demonstration par excellence of what Wieman means by divine creativity. Let us not forget that in Wieman's system of thought "divine" has no reference to anything supernatural or even superhuman, but with the creative communication and interchange of the minds of men. Language is the predominant instrument of this interchange and, more than this, is the very instrument of creation of the human mind, both in the individual and in the race. Wieman writes,

> This kind of interchange creates progressively the human mind in the individual beginning with infancy; and during the past million years it has created the human mind in the species, beginning with the ape-like animal that initiated the use of linguistic signs.

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[28]Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 9.

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> These signs distinguish the human level because they carry meanings independent of the concrete existing situation and thereby gather additional ranges of meaning by contributions from different individuals and succeeding generations. This use of signs is precisely what is meant by creative interchange.
>
> The animal that became human underwent evolutionary transformation toward a big brain and other human features, not primarily by the selective process of struggle with subhuman environment, but by the selective process of struggle to meet the demands of ever wider community of minds in complex cooperation, based on language carrying an ever wider and more complex system of meaning that each individual was required to master.[29]

Thus in the intercourse of minds through the instrument of language, which always offers some leeway in meaning because its symbols never exactly reflect their referents, there is a sort of "stretching of the skin" of the mind to make room for innovating ideas. Wieman also notes that the arts, also instruments of communication, serve creativity in similar fashion.[30] The factor of prime importance here, however, is not the tool--language or the arts--but the inter-human communication and interchange.

It is interesting to note that though myth, paradox and non-cognitive symbol, as language and communication devices, seem peculiarly capable of producing "mind-stretching," Wieman, in his zeal for the use of descriptive

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[29]Wieman, "Reply to My Critics," p. 456.

[30]Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 272.

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language to the end that our ultimate commitment may be guided by descriptive knowledge, pays relatively little attention to these. He acknowledges their value in devotional usage and for indicating areas of mystery where knowledge cannot reach, but places his emphasis upon the need for more definitive language.[31]

Despite this, Wieman does stress mysticism as another means of attaining radical originality. Here the interchange or communication is not between minds, but metaphorically between an individual and the sensory world about him. "There are times," Wieman says, "when men, with a partial suspension of the thought processes, become blissfully athrill with the vast fullness of sensuous experience that rains down upon them."[32] Such ecstatic moments may also prove mind-expanding.

> That mysticism should issue in radical originality has its ready psychological explanation. In the mystic experience one becomes freed of all his old established meanings; he is lifted out of the ruts of his ordinary thinking; he is shaken loose from all his mental habits; his mental system is melted down into a fluid state; he becomes filled with a throng of free, uncontrolled impulses so numerous and diverse that they hold one another in obeyance, producing a quivering mass of sensitivity to the total undiscriminated situation.

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[31]Cf. Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," p. 21; "Reply to My Critics," p. 470.

[32]Henry Nelson Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 83.

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> When his mind recrystalizes out of this state it is quite likely to assume a different form from what it had before the experience occurred.[33]

Wieman suggests that the reflective thinker should attempt to "approximate this mystic deliquescense of meaning in his endeavor to deliver himself from all bias of prejudice and habit and give free play to every impulse in order to view the problem from every angle,"[34] and he further suggests that worship may help us to do this.[35]

Integration is the other element in intuition, which Wieman at one point defines as "the creative integration of diverse meanings to form a new, more ample meaning."[36] In the extreme instance of mystical experience, as in the quotation above (N.33), this would be the recrystalizing of the mind following the ecstatic moments.

A less extreme and more normal form of mental experience utilizing integration Wieman calls "contemplation"--"precisely the thinking which is dominated by the motive to integrate experience more widely and completely."[37] He distinguishes this type of thinking from practical or instrumental and from theoretical or hedonistic thought.[38]

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[33] Ibid., p. 346. [34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., p. 351

[36] Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 184.

[37] Wieman, Religious Experience . . . Method, p. 75.

[38] Ibid., p. 346.

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When integration occurs in the mind it is liable to exert an emotional impact. Wieman writes,

> When many different observations made in the past are . . . seen to fit into a beautiful and significant system of meanings by reason of a new idea, one is likely to have a profound emotional experience. The experience is not what validates the idea, but it may spring from the fact that one has gathered through past observations the evidence that does validate. In the past one has gathered the fragments of a pattern through many observations. Now at least he sees how they all fit together.
>
> This experience we have just described is what is sometimes called intuition or insight. It may be called religious experience if it has to do with patterns that have religious import. When the new life is felt to be of utmost importance for one's whole life, and the emotional experience is very deep, it may be called mystical experience.[39]

Emotion should operate in creative thinking both as a resultant, as above, and as a motivating factor. Wieman asserts that religious inquiry must be passionate. "Passionate inquiry," he says, should both cause us to be ready "to recognize our own distorting prejudices and pride, and the conditioning which falsifies our intuitions, and perceptions," and, after we have achieved knowledge, to "cast our whole self in religious commitment of faith under the guidance of this knowledge."[40]

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[39]Henry Nelson Wieman and Regina Westcott Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), p. 120.

[40]Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," p. 17.

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"Commitment to passionate inquiry," Wieman says "produces a state of mind in which fruitful intuition is most likely to break through the barriers of pride and conditioning."[41] Some of the fruits of intuition or insight, this first and creative step in the thinking process, Wieman describes as follows:

> These insights lead to deeper appreciative understanding of other persons and peoples; they lead to aesthetic perceptions more profound and vivid than previously possible; they lead to scientific generalizations more comprehensive, more precise and more coherent with other generalizations; they lead to greater mastery in the administration of social complexities; they lead to social organization releasing more individuals to actualize their potentialities in that relation to one another which is mutually sustaining and mutually stimulating.[42]

## III. CREATIVE INTERCHANGE

This "mutually sustaining and mutually stimulating" relationship is one productive of creative interchange. Wieman feels that this is the distinctive and significant thing revealed in the fellowship with Jesus, where it attained such prominence and dominance over counter processes that the world was given a hint of what man might become should he become completely committed to such creativity. Wieman emphasizes the fact that it was not any vision of the ideal nor any picture of Jesus, but

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[41] Ibid., p. 19.

[42] Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith, p. 9.

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the superb creative fellowship enjoyed by Jesus and his friends that constituted this revelation.[43] Creative interchange was both medium and message in the revelation of Jesus and his fellowship. On numerous occasions and in different ways Wieman has attempted to spell out what transpires in this process. Perhaps the simplest, most basic treatment, focusing upon what happens within the individuality of the persons involved, is this:

> When required conditions are present, a kind of interchange going on between individuals does two things; (1) it creates appreciative understanding of the unique individuality of one another and (2) what is thus learned by each from the other is progressively integrated into the unique individuality of each.[44]

Elsewhere Wieman further specifies the consequences of creative communication, noting that it not only increases the participants' appreciation of one another's unique individuality, but through this awareness of new meanings actually increases the richness of the quality of the appreciable world in which each lives. Furthermore, community among men is widened and deepened, resolving conflict or rendering it creative of greater good, and serving as the only basis for securing enduring peace.[45]

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[43] Ibid., p. 86.

[44] Wieman, "Knowledge, Religious and Otherwise," p. 23.

[45] Wieman, The Source of Human Good, p. 58; "Reply to My Critics," pp. 455 f.

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Two brief descriptions of God, who is creative interchange in Wieman's thought, provide capsule summaries of this process; "that which sustains and promotes mutuality," and "the power that makes us one."[46]

Wieman speaks of the role of the church as an instrument and vehicle of creative interchange. Its origin in history was in "the creative interchange between Jesus and his disciples," it continues as the "fellowship in which this kind of interchange occurs when it is centered in Jesus Christ." The individual is led to the distinctive act of Christian faith by creative interchange with those who have this faith. In fact, each of us is indebted, even bound, more than we realize to our religious tradition if we engage in moral and religious inquiry, for creative interchange within this tradition has created the symbols and meaning with which our minds operate.[47] "The revelation of God in Jesus Christ was, and continues to be the depth and transforming power of creative interchange in this fellowship."[48]

In Wieman's view

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[46]Wieman, Is There a God?, pp. 17 and 203.

[47]Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment, p. 125.

[48]Wieman, "Reply to My Critics," p. 461, (all direct quotations in this paragraph).

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> 'The Word of God,' whether recognized or not, is the more profound insight generated by integration of diverse perspectives when individuals are engaged in creative interchange centered on the endeavor to understand Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Bible and in the fellowship of the church.[49]

Finally, what is our responsibility as individuals and as members of the church and other communities with respect to creative interchange? Wieman replies,

> The problem is not to go forth and practice creative interchange. That is impossible. The problem is to provide conditions favorable for its occurrence. It cannot be done directly by human purpose and plan because the creativity re-creates human purpose and plan. This is the reason it is called divine creativity in contrast to human creativity. Human plan and purpose can provide conditions favorable for the occurrence of this divine creativity but cannot control or direct what it will produce in the form of innovating insight that widens and deepens appreciative understanding among individuals and peoples. To provide these conditions means pre-eminently to shape our major institutions so that individuals, groups, and peoples will have those relations to one another and those attitudes in which creative interchange can occur most effectively.[50]

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[49] Ibid., p. 461.

[50] Ibid., p. 462.

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## CHAPTER IV

## WORD OF GOD--GERHARD EBELING

We turn now to the thought of a continental theologian and church historian, Gerhard Ebeling, which focuses in the Word of God. "In his view all theological thinking, whether it concerns revelation, proclamation, or faith, is the 'coming to expression' of the Word."[1] His great concerns have to do with the clarification of the meaning of word, relating this to and through it demonstrating man's linguisticality, bringing all of this together in focus upon God's Word and its coming or actualization in the reality of the event of faith. Ebeling has understandably been deeply involved in discussion of the hermeneutical problem, which he approaches not primarily from the traditional standpoint of exegesis--the theory of exposition--but as having to do more with how the Word of God comes to understanding.

S. Paul Schilling states that in conversation with him Ebeling identified two main roots of his thought: the Protestant heritage as found in Luther, Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm Hermann; and the historical-critical methodology

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[1]S. Paul Schilling, Contemporary Continental Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 121 f.

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which emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[2] David James Randolph further points out Ebeling's indebtedness to the insights of Heidegger at two points, particularly pertinent to this study: the eventual nature of reality (reality as event) and the relationship of reality and speech.[3] He notes James M. Robinson's summary and appraisal of Heidegger's thought about reality:

> 'Being' is not a fixed concept, but an occurrence that happens to us, something that dawns on us, and the various views about being that have been held over the centuries are the necessary result of the way in which being on various occasions has shown itself. This is a more primal grasp of the nature of thinking than is characteristic of the subject-object approach.[4]

Ebeling demonstrates his agreement with such ideas when he writes,

> The German word for 'reality' (Wirklichkeit) brings out the fact that the real is one way or another something which is effective (wirksam), active, mighty, which has the capacity to impress as real, to assert itself and gain recognition as real, to concern man as real, and which, in that it contains possibilities and hence has capabilities, has a reference to the future.[5]

Again Ebeling speaks of "a concept of reality which

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[2]Ibid., p. 120.

[3]David James Randolph, "Introduction" in Gerhard Ebeling, On Prayer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 9 f.

[4]James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (eds.), The Later Heidegger and Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 23.

[5]Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 379.

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takes its bearings not on objectification but on historic encounter, not in the availability of reality but in its linguisticality, not in the existing present but in the future that is still to come."[6]

The above reference to "linguisticality" reflects the second Heideggerian influence already referred to. Randolph notes Heidegger's radical reinterpretation of language not as something that "points" but as something that "brings to expression."[7] We shall see later how Ebeling has utilized this understanding.

## I. EVENT

Event, and event viewed in the Heideggerian sense as of the essence of reality, is central in Ebeling's understanding of revelation. There is a peculiar two-pronged emphasis in Ebeling's thought at this point, though "prong" is not an accurate figure for each aspect of the twofold emphasis must be included in the other for the event to qualify as revelation.

On one side, revelation is the historical event of Jesus Christ recorded in Scripture. It is unique in its revelational potential, it has a "once-for-all" quality, but as history it is essentially not unlike any other event

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[6]Ibid., p. 199. [7]Randolph, op. cit., p. 10.

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and is, therefore, completely accessible to historical observation. The revelation lies in the event itself, not in some propositional knowledge or metaphysical truth imparted through it, nor in the fact that it is recorded in a sacred book. Ebeling writes,

> . . . What counts as revelation is not so much . . . or at least not in the first instance holy scripture, . . . (nor) the disclosure and communication of general timeless truths. On the contrary, revelation is primarily and properly a definite event--namely, the event attested in holy scripture--which again, to define it still more clearly and state its absolute peculiarity, is the appearance of Jesus Christ. To this event, then--the event of revelation in the most proper sense, and the one in which at the same time the historical origin of Christianity is concentrated--there belongs once for all abiding, normative absolute significance.[8]

Then Ebeling goes on to point up the other facet which must be included in revelation--its disclosure to faith as present event.

> . . . The event in question is one which, although it is attested as a unique historical event and as such belongs to a definite fixed past, nevertheless does not become a thing of the past but has a constant present quality. The historical Jesus of Nazareth is proclaimed as the present Lord exalted to the right hand of God, the work wrought in his suffering, dying and rising again is proclaimed as the revelation that is wrought for all time and therefore always present.[9]

Perhaps it would be more accurate to picture Ebeling's conception of revelation as a three-tined fork (though, again, the tines must somehow blend together) for

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[8]Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 29.

[9]Ibid.

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he sees proclamation, here referred to, the witness of revelation, as a third element which is required if the whole is to become revelation. Of the total relationship he says,

> An essential feature of the Christ-revelation is the sense of the theologia crucis in that its nature as a historical fact can be grasped only when it is seen as a historical fact. On the other hand, as a historical fact it can never become revelation for us. It can confront us as a revelation only when it is an event proclaimed to us, that is to say, a word which as such is admittedly no more than a secular, human word unless it finds faith. As a believed word, it must itself become the event to which it testifies, the fieri of the factum esse. If Holy Scripture is to be understood as the Word of God, everything depends upon maintaining unfragmented this relationship between revelation in history, the word of testimony, and faith as the present event of revelation.[10]

When we speak of the Bible as the Word of God, Ebeling is careful to point out, we must be sure to relate this statement to two others: "The Bible is a human word which we encounter in the world and history," and "The Word of God is God's action in the present day." Failure to consider properly the first of these leads to an uncritical identification of the biblical word and God's word, and a propositional understanding of revelation as revealed doctrine. Ebeling feels it is unnecessary to identify Scripture with the Word of God simply to call

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[10]Gerhard Ebeling, The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 75.

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attention to the special character and significance of biblical doctrine. And making such an identification for the purpose of distinguishing the Bible from all other literature, making it the vehicle of special doctrinal revelation, subject to fundamentally different conditions of development, understanding and interpretation than other literature, ignores its historical relativity and the humanity of its language. Such a doctrine of inspiration "erects a wall around the Bible and, instead of risking an interpretation of the Bible, basically only recites it. Such a doctrine understands the Bible not as a message to the world but as a secret teaching for the initiated."[11]

There is also, however, a subtle danger, comparable to the above, that arises when we relate revelation too intimately with a particular history or set of historical events and which may do violence to this history as history, and, consequently as revelation. Ebeling writes,

> . . . if the historicity of revelation is said to be a historicity that is essentially different and ontologically unique, in contrast to the historicity of history in general, we have turned our backs on the message of revelation of God in history.[12]

The correlation of history and present-day event as revelation by the instrumentality of proclamation is suggested when Ebeling discusses his understanding of church

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[11] Ibid., pp. 71 f. [12] Ibid., pp. 73 f.

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history. He defines this as the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Interpretation is the key factor here, for it "comprehends the structural relationship between identity and variability, showing how variability is connected with identity and how identity is of necessity transformed into variability." The unchanging factor--this identity--in the history of the church is its origin, Jesus Christ. But this cannot be separated from the elements in church history which change and pass away.

> . . . Witness to Jesus Christ . . . is not given to the church as something which must simply be preserved unchanged or consistently repeated and recited in its original historical form. The witness to Jesus Christ which makes the church the church is not the witness made by primitive Christianity but the contemporary proclamation of this witness. If the original witness to Jesus Christ were proclaimed without interruption, it would not really be proclaimed but would be converted into a secret language which is not addressed to the world.[13]

Tradition is an important element in church history, relating past and present. Ebeling, the church historian, has an understanding of tradition consistent with his finding reality in living event. He sees tradition as having to do with what is stable and constant within historical change, "the heritage of the past which lives on in the present and outlasts historical change," "the still-living past, the past that is not past, or the past

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[13]Ibid., pp. 102 f.

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which continually makes itself present."[14] The definitions might sound rather impersonal, even mechanical unless one remembers that this is virtually the same as the identity within change which he has elsewhere said was Jesus Christ. What this means--what Jesus Christ means when man confronts him today--may be suggested as Ebeling goes on to describe the role of tradition:

> This living past, which transmits itself as tradition and thus remains present, exists not as historical recollection but as something that makes a direct claim to authority. Tradition is a past that calls for commitment and therefore a past establishing guideposts for the future. This normative character of tradition presupposes human freedom; on the one hand, because tradition endures only through the affirmation and acceptance of tradition--and therefore, simultaneously, through participation in the transmission of tradition--and on the other hand, because critical alertness is required to maintain the purity of tradition and to draw the crucial distinction between genuine and false tradition. As a norm, tradition is always a threatened norm which requires testing. It calls for selectivity in one's decisions about the past, as this exerts its power upon the present.[15]

Church history, and the church itself, comes to focus in Jesus Christ. Ebeling writes, "The existence of the church in history depends from start to finish upon the way in which the church is related to its origin."[16] And again, "Christianity stands or falls with the tie that

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[14] Ibid., pp. 37, 39. [15] Ibid., pp. 39 f.

[16] Ibid., p. 96.

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binds it to its unique historical origin."[17] A footnote, referring to the word "historical" (historisch) in the last quotation, indicates that this means "accessible to or connected with the methods of scientific historical research." Ebeling believes emphatically that theology and church history must consistently and throughout utilize such methods in the investigation of this special concern, the relationship to Jesus Christ, who is the historical origin of the church. He says:

> . . . There can be no question of constructing over a purely profane historical analysis of church history a theological upper story, something like an edifying afterthought. It seems to me imperative, if we are to investigate church history objectively, that we in the last analysis search for this relationship to Jesus Christ, the origin of the church as this relationship is attested in church history. Here we also have an illustration of the fact that theology has nothing to fear from the scientific method; on the contrary, only a strictly scientific procedure allows us to see the theological relevance of church history.[18]

Such concern with historicity has caused Ebeling to become deeply involved in the "new quest for the historical Jesus." Implicit in Ebeling's view of revelation there seems to be a resolution--so far as it can be resolved--of the problem to which the "new quest" addresses itself, that of the relation of the historical Jesus to the Christ

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[17]Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 28.

[18]Ebeling, The Problem of Historicity . . ., pp. 97 f.

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preached in the kerygma of the primitive church. Recognizing uncertainties and tensions within and between the positions of those who stress one or the other of these aspects of church history and consequent theologizing, Ebeling's concept of "historical" and of revelation through the historical event of Jesus Christ brings these two together. Randolph, interpreting Ebeling, says,

> . . . the "historical" for Ebeling is not a simple, one dimensional category. The historical which gives rise to Christianity is not a "fact" or a set of facts back there somewhere which are to be collected and commented upon. Rather it is an event which is to be shared and interpreted. This is said not as a concession to faith and dogmatics, but because of the character of the historical.[19]

Thus "the historical Jesus (who) is the Jesus of faith"[20] is both the Jesus of history, about whom, even from the kerygma-oriented New Testament writers "we do gain a historically reliable general impression,"[21] and the Jesus of the kerygma. Or, we might say, the Jesus of the kerygma is the Jesus "revealed" in history--in the past event of his appearing and the present (at the time of the kergymatic interpretation) event of his proclamation. Schilling, also interpreting Ebeling says,

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[19]Ebeling, On Prayer, "Introduction," p. 16.

[20]Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 298.

[21]Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 52.

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> . . . the historical Jesus and the Christian kerygma are related as implicit and explicit Christology. The implicit Christological proclamation--the person Jesus himself--is the basis for the explicit Christology of the church's preaching.[22]

Ebeling would be cautious about identifying historical Jesus and primitive kerygma in any such way, however, lest the result be a propositional objectification that might stand in the way of present actualization of this revelation in word-event. James Robinson says that, under the influence of Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs, the term "kerygma" has tended to pass out of the vocabulary of the new hermeneutic and to be explained and replaced by the term language-event or word-event, in which Jesus and the church's proclamation (past and present) belong together.[23]

## II. LINGUISTICALITY

Reality for Ebeling is an event. Following the lead of Heidegger he sees language as that which brings events to expression, thus giving them reality in terms of our understanding. Language (or word, which is the designation Ebeling usually uses) does "point"--indicating something we are already knowledgeable about--but, much

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[22]Schilling, op. cit., p. 130.

[23]James M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic Since Barth," in James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (eds.), The New Hermeneutic (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 62.

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more than this, in the word-event it brings to reality that which is expressed, it bestows being. As Heidegger says, "Language is not a mere tool, one of the many which man possesses; on the contrary, it is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the openness of the existent."[24]

Ebeling notes how confused is our usual conception of the relation of language and understanding. We generally think of understanding as that which we apply to language or word. It is the other way around. "The primary phenomenon in the realm of understand is not understanding OF language, but understanding THROUGH language."[25] Rather than being the object of understanding, the word is what opens up and mediates understanding. The word which brings something to understanding thus has a hermeneutical function.

Ebeling makes enlightening use of prepositions to indicate how external reality is communicated to us in the word-event:

> Word-event is always communication of what . . . lies extra nos. What takes place in the word-event is characterized by the formula that I speak to you about something. Perhaps the corresponding Latin preposition

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[24]Martin Heidegger, Existence and Being (Chicago: Regnery, 1949), p. 276.

[25]Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 318.

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> de ("down from") or the Greek περί ("gathered round") can bring out more clearly the significance for the word-event of the thing extra nos which comes to be communicated in it. The thing spoken of (German: über) is the source from which the word comes down to me. It is the thing around which the word gathers. It is therefore, however, also the place to which the word leads, or the thing which arrives in the word. Or if we may interpret the German über ("over") as a reference to the ground underneath, the thing spoken of (= über!) is the ground of the word-event, which releases word-event and causes me to have something to say. In the word-event as communication between men there is thus always world present. Word-event is communication of world.[26]

The deeper significance of language is indicated as Ebeling speaks of what it means to tell the truth. He says,

> In the first instance it manifestly means to set reality into words. This process could be compared say, with the fact that a precious stone shows to full advantage only when it is properly cut and set. Truth is reality set in words, and thus the making known of that which--as command and promise--is the mystery of reality.[27]

This "mystery of reality," this "hiddenness," this "radical questionableness" is elemental in that which constitutes man's linguisticality and that which leads him to God. Ebeling writes,

> The question how God is actually experienced, how it can actually become clear what God means in the context of the reality that encounters me, can be answered in the first instance only by the pointer:

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[26]Gerhard Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness of the Ethical," Journal for Theology and the Church, II (1965), 129.

[27]Gerhard Ebeling, God and Word (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 23.

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> God is experienced as a question. In the context of the reality that encounters me God encounters me as the questionableness of that encountering reality.[28]

Herein lies man's linguisticality, for in the face of this mystery man is called to answer. Yet he must respond in passivity. "He is summoned to word, so that his word is always only an answer. And he in turn has to answer for this answer: he has to await a judgment to which he can add nothing."[29]

Thus the very word "God," and for that matter, any word, when man attempts to speak the truth, means the basic situation of man as word situation, for the attempt to speak of reality compels man to face up to its radical questionableness and reply with an answer which can only be provided for him. Even the language with which we answer is inherited, and thus betrays man's lack of self-sufficiency.[30]

This passivity and dependency is a clue to the fact that this word-event is revelation. Ebeling writes,

> For here activity belongs to God alone, and to man nothing but receiving. Knowledge of God is essentially determined by the fact that God gives himself to be known, and so gives man to know himself as the creation already known of God. The knowledge of God has

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[28]Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 347.

[29]Ebeling, God and Word, p. 30.

[30]Ibid., pp. 29 f.

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> therefore nothing of the character of spontaneous investigation and discovery on man's part. Rather, the fact that God is man's creator is the basic principle of revelation. Man's knowledge of God rests on his being known by God, his love of God on his being loved by God, his addressing God as God on his being accepted by God. Revelation certainly does not mean that some kind of additional, new objects appear on my horizon and now become objects of my activity. Rather, revelation means the brightening, the illumination of the whole of my existence with everything it embraces. Revelation does not mean that something is handed to me which I must then take the trouble to clarify and understand and relate to my reality. Rather, a revelation is itself light and therefore a source of light, not a single object for consideration, not anything at all that seeks to be considered in itself, as little as the source of light is there to be looked into (which everyone knows blinds instead of illumining). Rather the source of light serves the illumination, and therefore the knowledge of the reality which concerns me in any case, so that strictly I myself together with the reality which concerns me am the object of revelation, the object on which revelation is bestowed and which is therefore brought to light. Thus as passive receiver I myself together with the reality which concerns me belong of necessity to the event of revelation.[31]

We have noted that Ebeling says that the word "God" means the basic situation of man as word situation, that is, it asks the radical question about man and reality, "the basic question that precedes and underlines all individual claims, 'Adam, where are you? . . .' 'Man, where are you?'--that is to say . . . the question which challenges us in person, summons us to life, and at the same time summons us to ultimate responsibility,"[32] and to this

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[31]Ebeling, Word and Faith, pp. 350 f.

[32]Ebeling, On Prayer, p. 139.

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question demands an answer. Faith, through the revelation in Jesus who is witness and ground of faith, provides the answer. Schilling interprets what this answer means by saying,

> The man of faith faces existence in neither fear nor resignation, but as a participant in the omnipotence of God. Faith is not a resigned submission to reality but a winning of power over it. "The certainty of faith is . . . taking sure steps although no way can be seen, hoping although the outlook is helpless, refusing to despair although all is desperate, being firmly grounded although stepping into a bottomless pit."[33]

It should be noted that Ebeling feels we can speak of God appropriately only in personal commitment, not in objectifying statements. He emphatically rejects the subject-object antithesis. God is not an object at man's disposal, nor can man be understood apart from his relation to God. God can be known not as he is in himself--this would set him apart from man--but only in terms of what he does in relation to man.[34] In like fashion, God cannot be known apart from the reality of the world. Ebeling writes,

> It is a cardinal error in theology when God is spoken of as a part of reality and when for that reason God is thought of as something additional to the rest of reality. The inference is that we should

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[33]Schilling, op. cit., p. 132. The final quotation is Schilling's translation of a portion of Ebeling, Word and Faith, pp. 240-243.

[34]Ebeling, The Nature of Faith, p. 108

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> first of all have to speak of God and the world in themselves as two separate entities side by side and only then of their relationship as of one mutual supplementation or of mutual competition. But the fact is that God cannot be spoken of in theology without the world thereby coming to expression as event, and the world cannot be spoken of in theology without God thereby likewise coming to expression as event.[35]

The nature of the word-event in which God is revealed does call attention to an important aspect of God's nature--and of man's nature:

> Knowledge of God as word-event implies knowledge of God as Person. For that reason what is called knowledge of God stands or falls with the possibility of prayer. Prayer is the most direct expression of the knowledge of God, in so far as it answers to God's Word. Thus everything now comes to this, that knowledge of God is knowing God as a Person. This, however, cannot be present on its own, but only in the context of the doctrine of the Word of God. . . .
>
> . . . we can speak properly of God only when in doing so we have an eye to man as a person. The personal being of God and the personal being of man, however, are not so to speak two separate things, but are to be grasped only in relation to each other. And only with an eye to this relation can there be talk of God which is not improper but proper to talk of God.[36]

## III. ACTUALIZATION

Ebeling uses the term "actualization" (though not with great frequency) to indicate--or should we say "bring to expression"--that without which the once-for-all

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[35] Ebeling, Word and Faith, pp. 324 f.

[36] Ibid., pp. 352 f.

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revelatory event in Jesus Christ does not become revelation. Revelation occurs when God's Word in Christ is heard anew, "with tense attention to how the traditional Word manages to make itself understood in the real circumstances to which our lives are exposed."[37]

This has already been noted, and this aspect of revelation is so interwoven with every other element that it can hardly be discussed apart from them, yet it is of sufficiently distinctive significance that we shall consider it separately here. Unavoidably, much of what we say will be reiteration of what has already been said.

Ebeling is convinced that his understanding of the actualization of revelation "to faith, through Christ, in word event" is distinctively Protestant and represents what is antithetical between Protestantism and Catholicism. He notes how early Catholicism, identifying revelation with holy scripture, was thus compelled to seek actualization of revelation in acceptance of the binding power of doctrinal and moral teaching derived from Scripture--that is, in law. He enumerates several types of attempted actualization practiced in Catholicism: "imitative historizing," the imitative reconstruction of an exceptional situation (in Scripture) by assimilation of the present to the past;

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[37]Ebeling, The Nature of Faith, p. 191.

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"contemplative historizing," through use of the church year, relics, pilgrimages, etc.; "mystical actualization," through direct contact with the revealing reality in the sense of immediate experience; "realistic metaphysical actualization," in the use of relics by which historical figures are made metaphysically and presently real; and sacramental actualization, demonstrated in the mass in which the one historical sacrifice is not repeated but is sacramentally present in the many and is objectified in the transubstantiated host. "The crown and consummation," says Ebeling, "is actualization through a spiritual institution."[38] All of these forms of actualization represent a return to the past or an interposition of the past into the present--even, it seems to me, in the last, actualization through the institution of the church, because of its tradition-bound nature (not exactly Ebeling's concept of tradition), although of this type of actualization Ebeling comments, "The perfect tense of the event of revelation is swallowed up by the continuous present of the church."[39]

Ebeling then describes the utterly different approach to actualization in Protestantism:

> The Reformation achieves the tremendous feat of reducing everything to this, that the historical ἅπαξ of revelation becomes present in faith alone. The sola

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[38]Ebeling, Word and Faith, pp. 32-35.

[39]Ibid., p. 35.

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> fide of the Reformation is directed not only against justification by works and thereby against a legalistic exposition of scripture, not only against mysticism and against multiplication of the revealing reality in the form of saints and against materialization of the revealing reality in the form of sacred objects. But the sola fide has undoubtedly also an anti-sacramental and an anti-clerical point. To the sola fide there corresponds solus christus. Revelation and the present are separated from each other in such a way that only one bridge remains: the Word alone--and, indeed, lest any misunderstanding should arise, the Word interpreted as salvation sola gratia, sola fide. All other bridges have been broken up. The whole system of Catholicism has thereby collapsed. But the actualization of revelation, understood as the self-actualization of Christ, takes place in each individual case through the Word--sola fide, sola gratia. We will not dwell on the dearness of the price paid for this change in understanding of the present actualization of the ἅπαξ of revelation. Humanly speaking, the price was a frightful impoverishment of religious life and an alarming surrender of religious safeguards. We will only ask what was thereby gained in regard to the question that concerns us here. For one thing: the reestablishment of the ἅπαξ in all its stringency and exclusiveness, and therewith the purification of the content of revelation from amplifications, additions and adulterations. And for another; the assurance of salvation that lies in the pro me. For the actualization as Catholicism understands it is such in and for itself. The question of appropriation remains the great point of uncertainty. Whereas Christs' becoming present in the faith as the Reformers understand it takes place pro me. The question of appropriation can no longer be separated from it all.[40]

Thus revelation is completed for the individual, and he himself finds completion, through faith. Ebeling devotes much attention to the meaning of faith. Schilling observes how in his interpretation he follows in the spirit of Schleiermacher, Herrmann, and Harnach, yet replaces old

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[40] Ibid., pp. 35 f.

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terms with words and meanings centering in personal existence. "For Example, Father, Son and Holy Spirit become respectively the truth, the communication and the courage of faith. Justification is the reality of faith, and the church is the summons of faith."[41]

Schilling presents a fourfold characterization of Ebeling's understanding of faith:

1. It is faith and faith alone that justifies. "It is the mystery of human personal being that it is summoned from elsewhere, that it exists in response and as response, and that man is therefore wholly himself when he is not caught up in himself, but has the real ground of his life outside himself."

2. Faith involves the whole person in the depths of his being. It is the basic decision as to "where man is, where he lives and is at home," it precedes, underlies and determines all his actions. It alone opens the way to genuine existence: It is existence which is sure of its ground, and is therefore enduring existence.

3. Faith is an event--something lived rather than something thought. It is therefore personal, its subject being not it but I. Yet it is not simply inward, but occurs in the "relation between the existing person and

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[41]Schilling, op. cit., p. 126. Cf. Ebeling, The Nature of Faith.

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that which is outside himself, namely, God"; "between man and the whole of reality which concerns him." "Faith lives not in the abstract, the general, and the timeless, but in the concrete, the particular, and the historical."

4. Faith is historical. Rooted in a unique historical occurrence regarded as revelatory, it is witnessed to--and nourishes and replenishes itself through that witness--by a succession of believers who have lived, acted, suffered, and rejoiced together in a concrete community of believers. It faces the future with hope, for the future belongs to God.[42]

Perhaps the first point is the most important in Ebeling's thought--that faith alone justifies. Faith, which completes and is the present actualization of revelation, is not an implement to this end, nor a human faculty, nor an accomplishment of man. Ebeling says,

> The event of revelation means that we receive in faith our existence extra nos, when God chooses to dwell within us (in nobis) through his Word, Jesus Christ. To ask whether this event is objective or subjective is entirely to misunderstand what is involved. Certainly, we must speak of an extrinsic character of the event of revelation, namely the extrinsic character of the verbum externum, which is itself founded upon the extrinsic character of the historical appearance of Jesus Christ. . . . But this extrinsic character of Christ and of the verbum externum is not of a sort that makes revelation empirically verifiable to me as revelation; instead, it confronts me with the claim to revelation as a call

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[42] Ibid., pp. 126 f.

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> to decision. I must decide either to abide in my own natural understanding of myself, in my own righteousness . . . and in boasting . . . or to believe that God himself confronts me in the word of the cross, . . . and thus to believe in the way described in Hebrews 11:1, according to which faith is the substance of things which do not appear.[43]

If there is an instrumentality it is God's Word, Jesus Christ, by which faith is mediated. Through proclamation of the Word, man is placed, Ebeling says, "in a concrete word situation which makes him open to his basic situation; it does so through a word of faith that testifies to love and therefore awakens hope." He continues,

> This is why the word of God is uttered historically and is inseparable from narrative, appearing in its fullness as man, as the man Jesus. To believe in him means to be transposed in him into our own basic situation.[44]

Ebeling summarizes what is involved in our relation to Jesus Christ in these words:

> According to the witness of the Holy Scriptures, a man's relationship to Jesus Christ is decisive for his salvation, because in Jesus Christ God meets man as the one who frees him from the dominion of this world and makes man free from his own dominion. This liberating change of lordship is the eschatological deed of God by which man understands himself as one who receives his life from God alone and not from the world. The one who understands himself in this way, that is the believer, no longer belongs to the world, for he lives in the world as one who belongs to God. Moreover, since, as a believer, he belongs to God through Jesus Christ, he is a member of the body of Christ, which is built up by the transmission of the

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[43]Ebeling, The Problem of Historicity . . ., p. 79.

[44]Ebeling, God and Word, p. 45.

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> message of Christ to the world. This body is the church, the holy and eschatological people of God. It is in one's relationship to Jesus Christ, that is, in faith, that the eschatological act of God takes place. Here Jesus Christ is present, the dominion of the world has come to an end, and eternal life becomes real in the midst of time.[45]

Some would seek salvation, faith, or what we have termed the actualization of revelation in the participation by the individual in the fellowship of the church, in a responsive awareness of what Ebeling calls co-humanity, in ethical sensitivity and conduct. Ebeling regards these as of vital importance, but for him they follow upon faith. In the word-event in which we respond to the radical question as to where we are and where we belong by acknowledging God's priority in all things, we gain the freedom from fear, self-interest and all else that restricts us in our relationships with others, which freedom enables us to reach out responsibly to others. Or, as Ebeling puts it,

> . . . the remedial word which is liberating word, and that means as word that gives freedom to exercise word, opens up freedom to exercise love because it communicates love as being loved. The middle term between word and love is faith. For faith, as reception of love addressed to me, is freedom to exercise love.[46]

Not only our relationships but the whole quality of

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[45]Ebeling, The Problem of Historicity . . . ., pp. 99f.

[46]Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness . . .," p. 129.

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life may be transformed when God's word of revelation is actualized in faith. Our awareness, appreciation, sensitivity to God's word in all things is quickened. The difference this can make is simply yet vividly depicted in Ebeling's sermon on the petition for bread in the Lord's Prayer. He says,

> Really, though, is anything still matter-of-fact when we are expected to think of God and man as so closely united that even bread, that epitome of the corporeal and commonplace character of human life, is to be thought of at the same time as God, and God at the same time as bread? Such thinking in fact puts an end to that deceptive matter-of-factness which prevents us from noticing, hearing, and understanding what everyday things are saying to us. . . . The more awake, attentive, and open our hearts become, the more meaningful and eloquent everything around us becomes and the more everything joins together in a single, living coherence. Bread is then no longer merely a thing to be regarded in physical or chemical terms, no longer merely a means of nourishment or enjoyment, but it is eloquent bread, bearing, so to speak, words that concern us. And this is not because it has a voice of its own, as found in fairy tales, but because God's word is present in all that is.[47]

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[47]Ebeling, On Prayer, p. 87.

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# CHAPTER V

## CURRENT CONCEPTIONS OF REVELATION

Many points of commonality, whether of outright agreement, similarity, or like emphasis, in the positions of Niebuhr, Wieman, and Ebeling, despite their differences of approach, suggest broad areas of concern and emphasis characteristic of contemporary thought about revelation. Some of these emphases, of course, are as old as the idea of revelation itself, but the interpretations given by these men provide today's flavor and style to them.

All three men, in typically contemporary fashion, approach the matter of revelation with a definite interest and concern for the human side of the revelatory dialogue or process, deeply regardful of the importance and manner of man's apprehension of revelation. This does not mean that they in any way minimize the objective factors in revelation--that which is revealed, the events in history and experience in which it is revealed, the media through which it is communicated. But of vital concern to each is the personal experience of revelation, what happens in this experience and what follows upon it in terms of transformation and redirection. Ebeling, particularly, emphasizes the impossibility of separating the objective from the subjective in the experience of faith, and, though he

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stresses God's priority and that which is extra nos, his whole orientation is an existential one. Richard Niebuhr, likewise, in his radical monotheism and understanding of God as infinite Absolute accents the divine, but this is balanced on the subjective side by his historical relativism and his recognition of the dynamic quality of revelation which calls for the exercise of imagination and reason and is an experience of radical transformation. Wieman, too, emphasizes the transcendence of God, his being beyond human prediction or control, but in his insistence that God is not beyond space and time, not a cosmic or super-cosmic being, both intimately related to man by being the process by which men live and by which human good is attained, he keeps a focus upon subjective aspects of religion. His concept of revelation as "creative transformation," achieved through "contemplative thinking" and "creative interchange" illustrates this focus.

Another point with respect to revelation on which all three are emphatically agreed is that revelation is not propositional. It is not knowledge, doctrines, beliefs or anything that can be possessed but a realization of meaning, a redirection of life that comes when man confronts himself and his situation in the light of God's mighty acts.

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## I. OBJECTIVE ASPECTS

Despite Ebeling's rejection of the subject-object antithesis, it is possible to note in the thought of all three men elements or aspects of their understandings of revelation which are primarily oriented to its objective (external to the recipient) or subjective (internal) sides. Sometimes both objectivity and subjectivity are so involved that it is difficult to categorize an aspect as one or the other. One such aspect, which, however, seems more weighted on the objective side, is the manner in which all look upon revelation as an event related to an event or events. The focal objective event in Christian revelation is the event of Jesus. For Ebeling this is the unique once-for-all event, while Niebuhr and Wieman, though making it central, allow the possibility of other events eliciting revelatory experience, and Wieman finds the truly revelatory aspect of the event of Jesus in the creative interchange which occurred within the fellowship of Jesus and his early followers. For revelation to be revelation however, this historical event must be matched by or take on present quality in a subjective event for the individual "in which radical faith is elicited." Ebeling adds a third, mediating event--word, the act of proclamation, through which the objective event becomes a subject event or becomes incorporated as a

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directing factor in the experience of the subject.

Another point on which all are agreed is that revelation is divine self-disclosure. Ebeling is so emphatic about this, about man's passivity with respect to his knowledge of God, that he reverses the subject-object figure and says that man is the object of revelation, God the active subject. Wieman stresses God's active transcendence and conspicuous presence in the saving processes. While Niebuhr emphasizes the socio-historical relativity of faith, he strongly affirms that that which is apprehended in faith is not relative. Our apprehensions are relative, but the Absolute, the object of our apprehensions, is not. What appears to us in revelation is a demonstration--not of our own making--of the steadfast selfhood of the infinite Absolute. This self is personal, but not a person. Wieman says he is most appropriately symbolized in personal terms; Niebuhr speaks of his "personlike integrity," and describes God as "an 'I,' or like an 'I,' faithful as only selves are faithful"; Ebeling avoids descriptions, believing we can speak of God only in personal commitment, not in objectifying statements. Yet Ebeling feels man's personhood is a clue to the personhood of God, since either can be understood only in relation to the other.

The significance of the role of Jesus in revelation

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is also emphasized by these thinkers. For Ebeling this is crucial; the event of Jesus Christ is the act (or, at least, the first act) of revelation, possessing peculiar, abiding, absolute, normative significance. Ebeling's interest in the new quest for the historical Jesus reflects the priority he gives to this event; but in this revelatory act, as it is conveyed to us through the word of proclamation, we are confronted with a call to decision and it is only as we respond in faith that for us the total event becomes revelation. Niebuhr, too, makes much of the event of Jesus Christ as the central point in Christian revelation, though he does allow for the possibility and desirability of our finding revelatory significance in other events. His emphasis upon the role of Christ, however, is more on the subjective side, as he points up the way in which Jesus and the events of his life provide a symbolic image which helps us restructure our total understanding and redirect our lives, thus achieving the "permanent revolution" which is the sign in our lives of the fact of revelation. Wieman appears to place less emphasis upon Jesus as the focal point in revelation, probably chiefly because he feels much traditional thought at this point obscures the true nature of the God revealed in Jesus. He does not regard the revelation in Christ as utterly unique, and allows for many other revelatory agents, but,

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historically speaking, the Christ event is the most decisive in history. As we have noted, he seems to prefer to speak of revelation in the fellowship of Jesus, rather than in Jesus himself, because here the nature of God as creative interchange is more clearly seen.

The role of the Bible with respect to revelation has its place in the thought of each of these three men. As a record of faith and of religious history it is obviously an objective factor, yet the treatment each affords it with respect to revelation emphasizes its importance as an instrumentality for the subjective appropriation of revelation. Ebeling and Wieman both stress the Word of God with similar but much differently-expressed meaning. Ebeling, of course, places tremendous emphasis upon Word of God, but brings it to focus at two points with respect to the Bible: it is a simple, human record of historical facts, albeit a record of the facts of the once-for-all event of Jesus Christ, but possessing in itself no unique doctrinal revelatory significance; at the same time God's Word is God's action in the present day as the biblical message is proclaimed and elicits the response of faith, which in itself is an act of God. Wieman, too, would insist that the Bible is a human word, and also suggests that the Word of God is the action of God in present human experience. He uses this term to

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describe the profound insights produced when persons engage in creative interchange (God at work) centered on the quest to understand Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Bible and the fellowship of the church. Niebuhr also stresses the necessity of relating the Biblical record of faith to present experience, but, with his consciousness of the significance of historical relativity, sees this relationship mediated through "our history," which socio-historical orientation provides relevant and meaningful interpretations of Scripture, and of life through Scripture, which could never be produced by a purely objective view of the historical record.

## II. SUBJECTIVE ASPECTS

As we have repeatedly noted, all of these men--along with most contemporary thinkers in this field--approach the subject of revelation with a distinct recognition of and decided emphasis upon the role of the recipient of revelation. Even in their consideration of the objective elements of this experience there is a decided sensitivity to the subjective apprehension or utilization of these elements. As they use it the word "revelation" refers more to a subjective experience than to that which is revealed. Even Ebeling, in whose thought the subject's role is purely passive, concentrates upon

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the fact that revelation occurs in the event of a subject's encounter with "radical questionableness," upon linguisticality and its implications of a subject's both hearing and speaking, and upon the hermeneutical task of mediating subjects in proclaiming the Word so that revelation may occur.

The element of personal engagement or encounter with the divine, emphasized especially by Ebeling, is recognized as a central factor in revelation by all. Niebuhr sees the image of Jesus Christ mediating God's reality as of central importance to revelation in this regard. Wieman's great concern is that men recognize and identify the processes of personal and social transformation which they experience as the transcendent encountered God.

All are agreed that revelation is a dynamic process, with far-reaching existential consequences. To describe it they must use words like actualization, transformation, creative, radical, metanoia. But their descriptions go beyond words as they attempt to spell-out the psychological processes by which revelation is apprehended. The role of reason is central in this process for each. Ebeling, with his focus upon the priority of God's initiative and action in faith, seems to allow less recognition of this, but his entire concept of linguisticality, the very possibility of radical questionableness, demands a reasoning subject to

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recognize the questions. "Interpretation" is the key word for his thought and the means by which Word becomes the Word-event of revelation. Niebuhr describes revelation as "the discovery of rational pattern" and provides a carefully worked-out explanation of the way in which imagination and reason operate in revelation to provide integration of and interpretation for the diverse factors of history and experience which thus find and provide meaning and direction for our lives. Wieman provides a still more detailed account of the manner in which revelation operates as the intuitive, insight-producing process initial to the production of knowledge, growth in creative relationships, and transformation of human life.

That other than intellectual elements--emotional, volitional, social, environmental--are involved in the revelatory process is also recognized. Wieman and Ebeling are especially conscious of the role history, especially the historical stream in which we participate, plays in the revelatory interpretations at which we arrive. Wieman emphasizes the contemporary social setting more than the historical, making revelation as an experience dependent upon social intercourse. He stresses the role of emotion, calling for "passionate inquiry" if revelation is to result, and stressing commitment as the necessary outcome of revelation (if it is to be so-called), as do the others.

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All, and especially Ebeling, stress the centrality of faith in revelatory experience, and this involves the whole person in the depths of his being.

Just mentioned, but worthy of greater note, is the recognition by all of the significance of the subject's heritage, experiences, and position within the community of faith and of his commitment to its ends.

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# CHAPTER VI

## THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION

We turn now in our consideration to the process of perception, after which we shall endeavor to show its relationship first to learning, then to revelation, and, finally, through this mutual link, the co-relation of revelation and learning.

Between me as an active agent and the total world around me (which includes me as an object of which my subjective nature is also aware) stands a complex mediating process by which I become aware of my environment or situation, interpret it, and respond to it with the actions which constitute my life. This mediating process is called "perception." It is of central importance to--almost identical with--the process known as "learning," and is thus of vital concern to education. Christian education, especially interested in both interpretation of and response to life and life's situations, likewise needs to look carefully at this perceptual process.

### I. HOW PHILOSOPHERS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE EXPLAINED PERCEPTION

Frank J. and Elizabeth W. Estvan introduce their book with a concise yet lucid summary of the history of

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the thought of both philosophers and psychologists with respect to the nature and functioning of perception.[1] Here these paragraphs are reproduced for a similar purpose--to provide background for this study.

> How human beings go about this matter of perceiving the world has been contemplated by philosophers through the ages. For every conception of the "good life" or system of thought ultimately revolves around two pivotal questions: What is truth, reality, knowledge? How does the mind grasp (perceive) these things?
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> That perception has no simple explanation was apparent to the ancient philosophers. In a world where everything is in a state of flux as envisioned by Heraclitus, nothing would remain constant from one moment to the next. Also complicating the problem was the belief expressed by Pythagoras that there is no such thing as objective truth, but that each man has his own percepts from which he infers the percepts held by others.
>
> Distrusting the reliability of man's senses, many early philosophers formulated dualistic interpretations to account for perception and knowledge. Democritus regarded the former as being of two kinds: one involving the senses and the other the understanding. The latter is dependent only upon the things perceived which possess certain inherent properties such as weight, density, and hardness. Perception involving the senses may be subject to certain distortions, however, for qualities such as taste, color and tone are found in the perceiver rather than in the thing perceived.
>
> Plato created a different kind of dualism, that between reality and its appearance. The limitations of man's sense perception would always result in confused versions of reality. Hence, perception was not the same as knowledge. To gain knowledge it was necessary to evaluate and judge perceptions: in a sense, to reject the sensory world in favor of the

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[1]Frank J. and Elizabeth W. Estvan, The Child's World (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959).

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world of pure thought. For the Skeptics this meant turning away from the world as experienced by men and looking inward to engage in subjective thinking. To the Stoics, however, this unreliability of the senses was regarded as errors in judgment which could be avoided. This separation of knowledge and perception meant that for the Scholastics and other philosophers of the early Renaissance great reliance was placed on the theory of innate ideas or principles--all sorts of things which the mind was supposed to know a priori.

Perception came into its own again with the rise of empiricism which claimed that all knowledge is rooted in experience. Ideas were no longer imbued with mystical or subjective origins, but were regarded as outcomes of a functioning intellect. As Locke pointed out, this meant that perception was the first step or inlet of all the materials leading to knowledge. Berkeley went so far as to maintain that material things exist only through virtue of being perceived. All reality is mental, and what we perceive are qualities such as color and sound, and not the thing or substance itself. For Hume every impression had a corresponding idea and these were the constituents of more complex ideas. To perception he allied such things as identity, time, and space which he claimed were immediately observable, but causal relationships were reserved for the realm of reasoning for they are not readily apparent. Kant, however, did not disclaim the world of objects or "things in themselves." Perception to him is partly due to external things resulting in sensations, and partly to the perceptive apparatus which is subjective and not dependent upon experience. It is this which creates order and relationships among the sensations received. It is a priori and a constant sensibility or "intuition," two such forms being space and time.

The interaction between the perceiver and object in the act of sensation or perception was singled out for closer examination by later philosophers. In his emphasis upon action, Marx tended to replace "sensation" with "noticing," his point being that we notice those things which are a part of the process or situation in terms of which we are acting. Bergson made no distinction between the subject and the object, and actually considered matter and the perception of matter as being one and the same thing. For him, perception had its origin in purpose in the pursuit of which the brain served as a selective agent limiting what was being perceived to that which was practically useful

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or of interest to the perceiver.

Thus we acknowledge our debt to the philosophers for making clear the central position held by perception in the affairs of mankind. In their centuries of thinking about perceptual processes, they have traced many ramifications in human thought and action, and thereby identified the major points which must be considered in any attempt to understand how perceiving takes place. Many issues are not "settled" for not all philosophers have swung away from the dualism between reality and its perception to regarding perception as the test of reality. There is even less agreement as to whether perception is one of the givens and, therefore, a priori and intuitive or whether it results from effort on the part of the perceiver in the form of "pure" reasoning or mental activity based on past experience. In the main, however, philosophic inquiries have inevitably given recognition to the existence of some kind of interaction between the object and the subject, the more recent emphasis being on the first part played by the subject's purposes, interests and activities.

After more than two thousand years of theorizing about the nature of perception, in the course of which major reliance was placed on logical thinking, came the need for more exact data regarding the process involved. By the Nineteenth Century conditions were ready for the physiological study of human behavior. Out of this was born experimental psychology which fathered several different systems of psychology. Without exception, each gave a prominent place to perception, but its role or functioning was regarded differently.

In keeping with its physiological origins, emphasis was first placed on sensation. Once it was discovered that sensory and motor nerves are different (Bell and Magendie) the way was open for Weber, Fechner, and Helmholtz to make detailed studies of about a dozen senses (touch, optics, tone, etc.) and thus demonstrate that sensation and perception are susceptible to experimental study. Emphasis upon sensation reached its peak in Wundt whose first psychological laboratory in America ruled supreme between 1880 and 1890. Through methods of introspection he arrived at the conclusion that sensations were simple and sensory elements of consciousness and that perceptions were complexes of these sensations. His followers,

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Titchener and Kulpe, broke down sensations into many attributes which they regarded as the abstracted dimensions of consciousness, and in so doing they left little distinction between sensation and perception.

Contemporaneous with Wundtian concentration on the elements of mental life was the psychology of experience being expounded by Peirce, the founder of pragmatism, and William James. For Peirce, reasoning began with percepts and not sensory impressions, and meaning was not something inherent in a thing but was derived from the action that it involved. James, too, emphasized that the starting point in psychology is experience as it is perceived and not simple sensation, that sensations and perceptions are abstractions of experience which are gained through analysis. This functional, organismic and operational psychology was developed to its highest point in the writings of John Dewey. In the central position given to problem solving and critical thinking, he underscored the role of purpose as the selective agency in observation (perception).

Concentrating on the relationship of parts and wholes, but rejecting introspective methods, the Connectionalists (Thorndike) and the Behaviorists (Watson) studied with great exactitude stimulus-response and conditioned-reflex behavior. In so doing, discriminatory action was substituted for sensation, such selectivity being guided by certain states or conditioning of the subject. Reacting against this "piecemeal" and "mechanical" interpretation of behavior, the Gestalt psychologists (Wertheimer, Kohler, Koffka, Lewin) came forth with a psychology based on "insight" and the primacy of the whole. This was essentially a psychology of perception rather than of sensation in which configuration or the whole-part relations in a "field" held the key. All this was considered to be functions of contemporary arrangements independent of past experience in which no distinction was made between elements and complexes, and in which perception absorbed sensation.

Meanwhile other groups were concentrating more on the subjective meaning in perception than external or objective reality. Personality psychologists including the psychoanalysts (Freud, Adler, Jung, Rank) were becoming increasingly conscious of the idiosyncratic meaning which the world held for normal as well as disturbed people. To a large extent their therapy was centered on helping their patients "see things

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differently." The subjective aspect of perception was also used as a means of diagnosing and understanding the perceiver. The notion that perception is influenced by something other than the stimulus pattern was also recognized by social psychologists (Sherif, Cantril). They regarded individuals as adopting or conforming to "social norms," the latter constituting a frame-of-reference which was brought into play in the perceptive act. In this sense, perception merges with cognition and is regarded as the apprehension or undertaking of the complex interplay of social forces constituting the social situation in which the perceiver finds himself.

Thus, we see that psychological interest in perception began with a consideration of the minutia of the perceiver's sensory equipment, and was extended to include the totality of the social milieu in which he was born. In this process, sensation, perception, and cognition have played various roles, but always the attention has been upon the interaction between the stimulus-world and the perceiver's world. From this relatively simple act of combining sensations, perception has become a highly developed complex involving motivational states, body responses, and experimental background.[2]

## II. RECENT THOUGHT REGARDING PERCEPTION

The Perceiver as Active Organizer of His Perceptual World. Perception psychology has come to focus first attention upon the perceiver rather than upon perceptual stimuli. Stimuli do not make perceptions; perceivers do. A most important advance was made when psychology began to recognize the perceiver as an active organizer of the features which the observed phenomena have for him.[3]

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[2]Ibid., pp. 6-11.

[3]Warren R. Baller and Don C. Charles, The Psychology

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Stimuli are required, of course, if there is to be perception, but it is the perceiver who, in his own way selects, interprets, and acts upon the stimuli. The uniqueness of the individual's perceptions is vividly illustrated by the variety of interpretation and reaction when two or more people observe the same object or event.

> A large doll on display in a store window will be seen quite differently by a girl and a boy looking at it together. A rain cloud is likely to appear threatening to a picnicker. The same cloud may be viewed hopefully by a farmer whose corn needs moisture. An old dwelling much in need of repair may be looked upon by passers-by as a disreputable shack; to its occupants it is perceived as a comfortable place called home.[4]

The feelings and needs of the moment, one's past experience--which is always peculiar, even one's perceptual habits contribute to the unique perceptions each has of various situations.

Further evidence of the role of the perceiver as an active organizer is seen in the tendency, apparently innate, in each of us to find a structure, a pattern of relationships in any given stimulus situation. Psychologists speak of this stimulus situation as the perceptual field, and note how in any such perceptual field we distinguish a figure--that aspect of the field which for us is predominant, seen in sharpest relief--from the ground

of Human Growth and Development (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), pp. 110 ff.

[4]Ibid., p. 111.

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or perceptual background, the less differentiated parts of the field. The figure we perceive, however, may not be an isolated object or event. It may be a gestalt, a pattern or configuration of objects or events which is actually organized as such within our minds. Psychologists point to several factors which may be resident in the stimulus situation--proximity, similarity, continuity, etc., of parts, but it is the perceiver who uses these factors as "organizing principles" in creating his gestalt.[5]

If perception is the work of active organizers, an active process of interaction between organism and environment rather than a passive process of registration, this suggests that it must be regulated and given direction by what the organism is trying to do. Hilgard lists two underlying goals of the perceptual process: Achievement of environmental stability, and achievement of definiteness.

> The organism seeks a perceptually stable environment in somewhat parallel fashion to the way in which it seeks an internally stable environment. There is a kind of environmental homeostasis parallel to physiological homeostasis. In both cases the stability is one of dynamic equilibrium, not of static equilibrium. An environment that has some stable reference points in it can still be a changing one. The organism tolerates perceptual differences between night and day as it does physiological differences between sleeping and walking. But the organism does not like an environment that distorts too rapidly. If a man's environment distorts too rapidly, he gets upset or seasick.[6]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 108 ff.

[6] Ernest R. Hilgard, "The Role of Learning in

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An illustration of achieved perceptual stability is the fact that our visual world appears to stand still when we move our head from side to side, yet it moves if we see it through reversing glasses. Likewise, we learn to take into account light and shadow, distance, and the motion of many objects, both animate and inanimate, to make our world of real and apparent change and mobility more constant than it really appears to our senses, for we need a stable, reliable world in which to satisfy other more pressing motives.[7]

The second goal, definiteness, is demonstrated in the tendency, previously mentioned, to structure into figure and ground. We prefer to see an assortment of lines as a geometrical figure, to ascribe to configurations of random and varied objects or events a thing-quality. We seek clarity and definability in the things we encounter. Hilgard feels this is a part of our defense mechanism. We fear the strange and unknown; we seek to identify all so that we may be ready for the dangerous--or to pursue the desirable.[8] It would seem also that we seek to understand and identify things so that we can

Perception," in Robert R. Blake and Glenn V. Ramsay (eds.), Perception (New York: Ronald Press, 1951), p. 103.

[7]Ibid., p. 105. [8]Ibid., pp. 105-6.

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manipulate them, use them for our own ends.

Perception as a Categorizing Process. Both of the above goals are usually served in an act of perception, for when we perceive something we seek to define and clarify it and realistically relate it, through both identification and differentiation, to the order of things to which it belongs. Jerome S. Bruner has said this in another way when he declared that all perceptual experience is necessarily the end product of a categorizing process.[9] Whatever is perceived is placed in and derives its meaning from a class of percepts with which it is grouped. The uniqueness of a thing inheres in its deviation from the class to which it is assigned. Bruner says, "If perceptual experience is ever had raw, i.e., free of categorical identity, it is doomed to be a gem serene, locked in the silence of private experience."[10]

Such a unique experience would be meaningless, for meaning derives from or consists in the relationships of things and experiences which the perceptual categorizing process clarifies. Solley and Murphy state that "meaning is essentially differentiation and integration of sensory,

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[9]Jerome S. Bruner, "On Perceptual Readiness," Psychological Review, LXIV (1957), 123-152.

[10]Ibid.

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perceptual and motor events which have implicative or prognostic value for other sensory, perceptual or motor events."[11]

Various contemporary writers on perception use different terms in describing the perceptual process, and see its sequential divisions in varied ways, yet all seem to have the same general understanding of the process and its stages. Ross L. Mooney's description stands close to Bruner's definition of it as a categorizing experience.

> The process of perceiving is . . . also a process of "abstracting," "conceiving," and "statistical averaging" operations which are apparently required to permit the emergence and use of the "signs" we get when we see things. The effect of these operations is to produce a "one-ness" from a "manyness," permitting past time to have a functional value for the present. Thousands of specific past experiences could not have a functional value to us were they not distilled toward "one" since the thousand would only mean confusion and paralysis of action. With a "one" we have a prediction on which we can act in a specific concrete situation. . . .
>
> Action is a concept which emphasizes sequence of experience through time, and perceptions are agents which allow experiences to get together through time. Perceptions work in the "now" formed between what has been and what is taken as yet to be. Perceptions work to bind time together. Perceptions thus are "ham actors," not only in the sense of their being agents for the conducting of business between what is "out there" and "in here," but also in the sense that they carry action from the past through the present into the future.[12]

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[11]Charles M. Solley and Gardner Murphy, Development of the Perceptual World (New York: Basic Books, 1960), p. 314.

[12]Ross L. Mooney, "Perception as a Transaction"

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Gardner Murphy distinguishes four stages of perception. The first is a blur stage, with many stimuli impinging upon the sensory organs but not differentiated or making any particular impression. Then comes the stage of differentiation, in which for various reasons particular aspects of the field are singled out for special consideration and identification. Integration follows as the differentiated object is "categorized" with similar objects according to the perceiver's past experience. Finally comes "anchorage," as the object is seen in its immediate context (the view now having been much clarified by the preceding stages) and taking on special prominence as a "figure" distinguished from its "ground."[13]

Bruner approaches the perceptual process in a different way, introducing the very important fact that perception begins not with stimuli alone, but with perceptual habit patterns, expectations, a mind-set based on past learnings, providing the initial stage which he calls hypothesis. The process as he describes it seems utterly different from that described by Murphy, until you realize that perceptions are built upon perceptions. Murphy's

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(Columbus: Bureau of Educational Research, Ohio State University, 1951), p. 10.

[13]Gardner Murphy, Personality (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), pp. 342 ff.

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"anchorage" stage provides the "hypothesis" with which Bruner begins a new perceptual process.

> Basically, perceiving involves a three-step cycle. Analytically, we may say that perceiving begins with an expectancy or hypothesis. In the language of Woodworth, we not only see, but we look for, not only hear but listen to. In short, perceiving takes place in a "tuned organism." The assumption is that we are never randomly set or eigenstellt but that, rather, we are always to some extent prepared for seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting some particular thing or class of things. What evokes an hypothesis? Any given hypothesis results from the arousal of central cognitive and motivational processes by preceding environmental states of affairs.
>
> The second analytic step in the perceiving process is the input of information from the environment (which environment includes the stimulus complex brought to us by distance receptors and by the somatic senses). Here we purposely use the term "information" to characterize stimulus input, for we are not concerned with the energy characteristic of the stimulus as such but only with its cue or clue characteristics.
>
> The third step in the cycle is a checking or confirmation procedure. Input information is confirmatory to or congruent with the operative hypothesis, or it is in varying degrees infirming or incongruous. If confirmation does not occur, the hypothesis shifts in a direction partly determined by internal or personological or experiential factors and partly on the basis of feedback from the learning which occurred in the immediately preceding, partly unsuccessful information-checking cycle. For heuristic purposes we speak of initial and consequent hypotheses, the latter being those which follow upon an infirmed hypothesis.[14]

The same process is described by Solley and Murphy, but in terms of five instead of three steps, which makes for greater clarity. These steps or subprocesses are:

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[14]Jerome S. Bruner, "Personality Dynamics and the Process of Perceiving," in Blake, op. cit., pp. 123 f.

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1. Expectancy - "the 'sets,' 'hypotheses,' and 'sensoritonic' states of the individual, which exist prior to proximal stimulation."

2. Attending - involves the "moment before stimulation" and the activities which prepare the organism for receiving stimuli.

3. Reception - "built-in determinants, such as (a) the autochthonous functions of the receptor organs, (b) the characteristics of the projection areas linked with the receptors, and (c) the dynamic interplay of receptor and projection area functions" provide for this "information" (Bruner) stage.

4. Trial and check - "tentative, unconscious inferences or hypotheses are tested and accepted or rejected on the basis of their congruity or lack of it with the surrounding context of perceptual, memoric, and autonomic traces."

5. Final perceptual organization--which leads to action and behavior, or may provide the "hypothesis" for a new perceptual cycle.[15]

Feeling. An important dynamic element in the complex process of perception is feeling, a factor emphasized by Ross Snyder. He speaks of the "thickness"

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[15]Solley, op. cit., pp. 18-22.

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(content) of experience and consciousness. This "thickness" consists of the flow of feelings and purposes, meanings, imagined futures, past experiences, "Seeings" (perceptions), and Ideas.

> . . . Down beneath everything is a flow (a duration) of feeling and purposing; much of it at the organic level. It is from the total organism and only partly conscious; often with no connection with the words or ideas that the person is speaking. The idea strand (a governing idea or succession of ideas) is at best of the same quality as the flow of feeling and purposing. . . .
>
> But there is a lot more going on inside us. For example, perceptions. In Bill's mind there is a "picture" of what the boss is like and how the boss sees Bill. A little more backlying in his perception of the kind of company it is that he works for, and whether the "top dogs" are worthy of respect. There is his feeling picture of himself--and that may not be too good as his wife has told him off that morning. . . . Our perception determines how we feel, what we will decide is relevant action, how much it is safe to communicate.
>
> But that is not all. Memories of previous experiences usually flood in upon any length of intensive experience. The experiences are usually those that have the same feeling tone as the present one, or the same shape of human relationships. . . .
>
> But not only the past comes up; we also begin to anticipate where this is leading us--expectations and imaginings of possible futures swirl in and add their power and sense of direction to the present experience. . . .
>
> So far we have talked as if all these were separate from each other. But they are all interrelated, and out of their welter and impact upon each other, a spoke of experience emerges. The ideas pour the content of many other people's esperiences into the welter; we talk it over with other people and listen to them. Out of the flow of feeling and purposing a

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> felt significance emerges; a certain punctuation or shaping of the experiences takes place and we have meanings as another content of the experience.[16]

Snyder's contribution here, compared with the thought of Solley and Murphy and others, should make us aware of the vast complexity of the perceptual process, for his entire "thickness" of experience really corresponds with perception as the others view it. The perceptions of which Snyder speaks are really residual hypotheses from previous perceptual experiences which are dynamically incorporated in a relevant immediate perception. Perhaps we could conclude that perception is the act of experiencing, at least that part of it which leads up to and determines behavior. It involves not only receiving, but the active, individual creation of meanings, feelings, ideas, decisions, and commitments.

This is also learning. Educators may properly evaluate learning in terms of the resultant conduct and behavior, but these are but results. The process which produces them is this perception learning process. As Snyder says:

> Perception--how you see a thing--determines how you feel about it and how you will act toward it. You don't begin by trying to change people's behavior. Behavior is too far down the sequence of the total

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[16]Ross Snyder, "The Communication Model of Learning." (Mimeographed.)

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> process. You may try to help them re-work their feelings, and primarily you will try to help them see the thing differently, because once this happens then all else is possible.[17]

Perceptual Determinates. While the learner or perceiver has been shown by modern psychology to be an active organizer of perceptual stimuli and not a mere receptor whose reactions are determined by what he receives, psychology has also shown us that others are significant perceptual determinants of which the educator should be aware. Solley and Murphy point out that what we perceive is determined by (a) hereditary factors which govern the limits and capacities of the perceptual process, (b) the cumulative effect of learning operations, and (c) the potentiation of one set of factors by the other.[18] In a more detailed summary Blake states:

> Each individual begins with certain physical structures, including the receptor, central, and effector nervous systems as well as the skeletal, respiratory, digestive, and other systems. These several part-systems in unitary organization constitute the more important structures involved in perception. The selective manner in which these part-systems are utilized in perception, however, is largely determined by the unique interaction between the individual and the cultural media which he has passed through and of which he is a part at present. Thus, the way one sees reality is contingent not only on the capacity of his given physical structure for detecting stimulus

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[17]Ross Snyder, "Views Which Influence Teaching." (Mimeographed.)

[18]Solley, op. cit., p. 318.

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> configurations and integrating information about stimuli but also on modifications in the use of the structure which derive from the impact of experience. The summed effects result in the individual's having more or less appropriate response patterns ready in order to cope with each of a myriad of specific stimulus configurations.[19]

Recent focusing of psychological study upon the empirical aspects of perception, the "cumulative effect of learning operations," should not make us forget the tremendous importance of the nativistic side of this operation, the physiological, structural determinants of what and how we perceive. J. J. Gibson calls attention to the little-appreciated fact that our awareness of the world is completely dependent on the activity of our sense organs and that if they fail to function or function erratically our understanding of that world may be completely altered.[20]

Not only anatomical factors are important, but chemical factors play their part, as becomes evident when through illness, etc. we are deprived of such elements. Dietary deficiencies, oxygen lack, hormonal imbalance, drugs--all of these can make pronounced impact upon the quality of perceptions.[21]

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[19]Robert R. Blake, "Perceptial Processes as Basic to an Understanding of Complex Behavior," in his op. cit., p. 9.

[20]J. J. Gibson, "Studying Perceptual Phenomena" in T. G. Andrews (ed.), Methods of Psychology (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1948), p. 158.

[21]Blake, op. cit., p. 12.

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This suggests that matters of health and physical well-being are important factors in perception and learning. The physiological condition of the pupil is his starting point for learning.

When we turn to the experiential determinants of perceptual activity we find again an exceedingly complex set of factors--What we have experienced, what we have perceived, what we have learned sets the stage for and conditions our new experiences, perceptions, learnings.

Social and cultural influences play their part. While we as individuals are "active organizers" of perceptual stimuli, when we get together we influence one another's patterns of organization. Sherif's experiments with autokinetic imagery have demonstrated this. This experiment involves observing a stationary pinpoint of light in a darkened room. To most persons watching this light intensely, it appears to move. Persons observing this alone established ranges of apparent movement which varied from individual to individual, but when the same subjects viewed it as a group, sharing their impressions of the light's "movement" their judgments of the movement tended to converge.[22] Interestingly, the degree of convergence in judgments in a similar test with children

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[22]Muzafer Sherif, "A Study of Some Social Factors in Perception," Archives of Psychology, XXVII (1935), 36.

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showed remarkable coincidence with the degree of friendship which existed between the various subjects.[23]

Not only our immediate friendships and contacts, but our whole cultural heritage, both in general and in terms of the specific sub-cultural groups to which we belong, exert tremendous influence upon our perceptions. A good illustration of this is the effect which language has upon us. In language we have a culturally agreed-upon set of categorizations or compartmentalizations, according to the words we use in communicating our ideas and perceptions of things. Thus when we use language either in communication or private thought, much of our perceptual categorization is already determined for us.

> As Whorf and other linguists have pointed out, we "cut up and organize the spread and flow of events" as we do because, through our mother tongue, we are parties to an agreement to do so, not because nature itself is thus compartmentalized for all to see. Thus, the Chukchee do not distinguish at the verbal level between blue and green (grass color) or the Trobrianders between blue and green (sea color). The Eskimo, on the other hand, who has names for a dozen varieties of snow surface and formation, must "see" a landscape different from the one that meets the eyes of a European traveler in the Arctic. In an investigation of the determinates of perception, then, it is necessary to consider macrocosmic "endowments" of culture-in-general, such as language, as well as specific institutions, mores,

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[23]H. E. Klein, "The Influence of Group Opinions and Prestige Factors on Children's Perceptions and Judgments" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska)

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socioeconomic factors, etc.--the components of culture in particular.[24]

Another tremendously important factor in determining perception is the perceiver's own perception of himself. Snygg and Combs have convincingly shown that man's basic need and motivation is "the preservation and enhancement of the phenomenal self."[25] Rogers likewise states, "The organism has one basic tendency and striving--to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism."[26] Earl C. Kelley suggests another related element when he speaks of enhancement and defense of the self as the primary goal[27] (Cf. Hilgard's feeling that fear of the strange and desire to be prepared for defense of the self underlies our perceptual striving for definiteness.)

Kelley suggests that for its own enhancement and defense the self needs boundaries to reach out from or to hide behind. The self-concept is this border or skin with which the self surrounds itself. The nature of one's environment--whether it is facilitating or endangering--

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[24]Blake, op. cit., p. 17.

[25]Donald Snygg and Arthur W. Combs, Individual Behavior (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 58.

[26]Carl Rogers, Christ-Centered Therapy (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1951), p. 283.

[27]Earl C. Kelley, "The Fully Functioning Self," in Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming (Washington: 1962).

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determines the permeability of this wall or skin, or, perhaps better, screen. It is perceptions which enter, or are rejected by this screen. In a friendly, helpful environment the self is glad to admit many and varied perceptual stimuli to utilize in the enhancement of the self. But in adverse conditions the screen becomes a shell, protecting the self--perhaps to the point where protection becomes isolation, and communication and nourishment (in terms of perceptions, ideas) is shut off.[28] The important thing is that it is how one sees and feels about himself that determines how one reacts to (or ignores) his environment.

Kelley says that the element which appears to determine selective intake is purpose. All living tissue is purposive. In man this purposiveness is only partially on the conscious level; in perception it operates automatically most of the time. What our psychological selves take in has to suit their purposes and fit into their past experiences.[29]

Murphy relates motivation to the perceptual process:

> A factor often neglected in the study of perception and thought has been motivation. As blurred percepts give way to differentiated ones, and these in turn give way to integrated ones, the underlying principle

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[28] Ibid., p. 15.

[29] Kelley, op. cit., p. 65.

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> is that of need, or drive, or tension. The latent aspects in a percept--as yet unresolved and lacking recognizable individuality--which have a stable relation to tension reduction, to satisfaction of a craving, tend more and more to stand out as figure against the background of other attributes; with each successive tension resolution and each change in the qualities of the total, perceptual sharpening is accelerated.[30]

Baller and Charles distinguish within motivation needs, values and interests. They refer to numerous perceptual tests and experiments wherein hunger has been a factor making for significant changes in what is perceived. They also quote a college student's term paper which testifies to her acceptance of science, despite a religiously dogmatic and anti-scientific upbringing, because "now I need science. I experience no difficulty now in harmonizing science and religion. I now look at these matters with different eyes from what I formerly did."[31]

Values they define as "abstract concepts that serve the individual as criteria of what for him has worth or 'rightness.'"[32] Religion, "power," aesthetics, humanitarianism are some of the values to which they refer as exerting selective power in perception.

Interests, also motivational but of a different

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[30]Murphy, op. cit., p. 345.

[31]Baller, op. cit., pp. 112 ff.

[32]Ibid., p. 114.

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quality and intensity than needs or values, are also a prime determiner of people's perceptions. Interest is "a mental (or behavioral) set resulting from one's feeling that an object or circumstances makes a difference to oneself--that it 'counts' and, therefore, should be attended to."[33]

> Has the reader ever been accompanied to a sports event by someone who had limited knowledge of the sport and little interest in it? Has he felt dismayed when, for example, just as the tying run was scored on an especially daring bit of strategy his companion exclaimed, "Oh, look at the way they spelled 'refreshments' in that ad on the fence!"[34]

Bruner speaks of interests, values, and attitudes as determinates of perceptual organization, and relates needs and personal modes of striving for goals:

> Not the amount of need but the way in which a person learns to handle his needs determines the way in which motivation and cognitive selectivity will interact. . . . On the whole, then, selectivity reflects the nature of the personal mode of striving for goals rather than the amount of need which he seems to be undergoing.[35]

Summary. In all of this we see how perception is understood today as the end product of a process of categorization, of rendering an indeterminate situation

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[33]Ibid., p. 115. [34]Ibid.

[35]Jerome S. Bruner, "Social Psychology and Perception," in Readings in Social Psychology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), pp. 85-94.

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determinate, confirmed in active response and commitment. Of prime importance is the fact that this process is conducted by one who is an active organizer of his perceptual world. Estvan and Estvan provide a rather comprehensive definition of perception stating that it is

> . . . an awareness of interpretation of a situation (stimuli) in terms of which the individual responds, and which he maintains or modifies in light of his experience. It involves a selecting element, for not all aspects of the situation come under the perceiver's scrutiny. It calls for an association of meanings with sensory stimuli which in many cases have an emotive or affective quality. This getting ready to respond or selection of things to respond to applies to all situations confronting human beings be they matters of the physical environment social relationships, school subjects--even in reacting or adjusting to one's self.[36]

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[36] Estvan, op. cit., p. 5.

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# CHAPTER VII

## PERCEPTION AND LEARNING

### I. THE PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION

Maurice Merleau-Ponty has sought to establish the underlying importance of perception in the philosophical as well as the psychological sense. The work for which he is probably best remembered--and this because its title so succinctly sums-up his distinctive emphasis and contribution--is The Primacy of Perception. In it he states his theme and purpose simply:

> The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence. This thesis does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth.[1]

More particularly he describes the consequences of this phenomenological approach in these words:

> Probably the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality. Rationality is precisely measured by the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges. But it should not be set in a realm apart, transposed into Absolute Spirit, or into a world in the realist sense. The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed when the paths of my various

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[1]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 13.

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> experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. . . . The philosopher tries to conceive the world, others and himself in their interrelations. But the mediating Ego, the "impartial spectators" (uninteressierter Zuschauer) do not rediscover an already given rationality, they "establish themselves," and establish it, by an act of intuition which has no guarantee in being, its justification resting entirely on the effective power which it confers on us of taking our own history upon ourselves.[2]

Perception, knowledge, meaning, learning, are all intimately related in Merleau-Ponty's view. "All knowledge takes its place within the horizons opened up by perception."[3] Perception is a "knowledge-bringing event."[4] It is "access to truth."[5] Because we are in the world and are perceiving beings, "we are condemned to meaning."[6] "I do not think the world in the act of perception," he says, "it organizes itself in front of me."[7]

The distinctive nature of this meaning-creating experience, which sets it apart from more formal thought processes, is suggested as he goes on:

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[2]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. xix f.

[3]Ibid., p. 207. [4]Ibid., p. 30.

[5]Ibid., p. xvi. [6]Ibid., p. xix.

[7]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sense and Non-Sense (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 51.

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> . . . When I perceive a cube, it is not because my reason sets the perspectival appearances straight and thinks the geometrical definition of a cube with respect to them. I do not even notice the distortions of perspective, much less correct them; I am at the cube itself in its manifestation through what I see. The objects behind my back are likewise not presented to me by some operation of memory or judgment; they are present, they count for me, just as the ground which I do not see continues nonetheless to be present beneath the figure which partially hides it. Even the perception of movement, which at first seems to depend directly on the point of reference chosen by the intellect is in turn only one element in the global organization of the field. For, although it is true that, when either my train or the one next to it starts, first one, then the other, may appear to be moving, one should note that the illusion is not arbitrary and that I cannot willfully induce it by completely intellectual choice of a point of reference. If I am playing cards in my compartment, the other train will start moving: if, on the other hand, I am looking for someone in the adjacent train, then mine will begin to roll. In each instance the one which seems stationary is the one we have chosen as our abode and which, for the time being, is our environment. Movement and rest distribute themselves in our surroundings not according to the hypothesis which our intelligence is pleased to construct but according to the way we settle ourselves in the world and the position our bodies assume in it. . . . Perception is not a sort of beginning science, an elementary exercise of the intelligence; we must rediscover a commerce with the world which is older than intelligence.[8]

One final quotation, which summarizes Merleau-Ponty's position, suggests why it is so important to relate perception to reasoning and learning processes:

> In speaking of the primacy of perception, I have never, of course, meant to say . . . that science, reflection and philosophy are only transformed sensations or that values are deferred and calculated

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[8] Ibid., pp. 51 f.

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> pleasures. By these words, the "primacy of perception," we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the task of knowledge and action. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality. This experience of rationality is lost when we take it for granted as self-evident, but is, on the contrary, rediscovered when it is made to appear against the background of non-human nature.[9]

## II. PERCEPTION IN LEARNING THEORY

Prior to the twentieth century learning theory was almost entirely developed on a non-experimental, philosophical, speculative basis. It seemed obvious that learning had to do with ideas, and for the most part ideas were central in theorizing about learning, even to the point where they, rather than the learner, were regarded as the dynamic factor in learning. Perception, if it played any recognized role at all, was in a subsidiary position.

Morris L. Bigge, in his Learning Theories for Teaching, notes three major strands of early learning theory.[10] Theories of mental discipline were among the earliest, and

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[9]Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception, p. 14.

[10]Morris L. Bigge, Learning Theories for Teachers (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

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these assumed a mind-body dualism which logically restricted learning to the mind-substance side of human nature, and saw it as a process of developing or training minds. Classicism, one type of mental discipline theory, understood knowledge as a fixed body of true principles which are to be handed down as a heritage of the race--and minds trained to handle these ideas are a requisite if this is to be done. Faculty psychology, formally developed in the eighteenth century, recognized various faculties of the mind--basically knowing, feeling and willing, but including sub-divisions of these, such as perception, imagination, memory and pure reason as aspects of the knowing faculty--and education's concern was seen to be the exercising of these faculties that they might be most effectively employed in handling ideas.[11]

Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel were outstanding representatives and advocates of another early trend in learning theory--the idea that learning is a process of natural unfoldment, of growth and development. There is little regard for perception under this theory; educators were to be concerned rather with freeing the learner from unnatural social environmental and other conditions that would restrict development, and with fulfillment of the

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[11] Ibid., pp. 19-28.

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needs of human nature.[12]

Appreciation is a third type of earlier learning theory. Like several more recent theories, it is based upon associationist psychology. Aristotle's observation that recollection is assisted by the association of ideas, through contiguity, similarity, or contrast, is a root-idea of associationism. He also recognized that the senses performed a function in learning, though for him this was secondary to the role of the faculties of the mind in developing innate ideas; the senses "tipped-off" or reminded these faculties of these ideas. John Locke, in the seventeenth century, developed the theory of empiricism which saw knowledge as totally derived from sense experience. Here perception assumes central importance and becomes synonymous with learning. Perceptions produced ideas which the mind, with an "internal sense," was capable of comparing with one another, generalizing upon and discriminating between; that is, they could be associated. These associations, however, were passive in nature.

It remained for Johann Friederich Hobart over a century later to develop the first modern systematic psychology of learning, apperception, based largely on Locke's thought. The fundamental difference lay in the

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[12]Ibid., pp. 31 f.

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dynamic quality he saw in the process of association of ideas. For Locke this was a passive, automatic process. For Hobart the ideas (not the persons) were dynamic. Ideas presented to the mind relate themselves to and are assimilated into the store of dynamic perceptions and images accumulated in the subconscious. Learning has to do not with the developing or training of a mind, but with the formation of this apperceptive mass. For Hobart perception is this apperceptive process.[13]

There are two major families of learning theory in the twentieth century: stimulus-response associationisms and Gestalt-field theories. Early in the century a new form of associationism became popular, not mentalistic but physiological. Nineteenth century developments in experimental physiology, plus the growing desire to be objectively scientific led to the development of psychology that sought to avoid introspection and concentrated instead on observable forms of behavior. Three associationist theories of learning rooted in this approach to psychology are noted by Bigge: Thorndike's S-R bond theory or connectionism, Watson's conditioning, and Hull's reinforcement and conditioning. All of these are of the "behavioristic" type of psychology, although this term was applied particularly to

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[13]Ibid., pp. 36-47.

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Watson's views, and although none are now advocated in their original form, many psychologists today follow closely enough in this stream to be termed "neobehaviorists."[14]

Bigge summarizes the contemporary positions of this group with respect to learning theory in these words:

> In the eyes of neo-behaviorists, learning is more or less permanent change of behavior which occurs as a result of practice. Thus the learning process consists of impressions of new reaction patterns on pliable, passive organisms. Since learning arises, in some way, from an interplay of organisms and their environments, the key concepts of neo-behaviorists are stimulus (that excitement which is provided by an environment) and response (that reaction which is made by an organism). Consequently, the problem of the nature of the learning process is centered in a study of the relationships of processions of stimuli and responses and what occurs between them. Since the focus always is upon behavior, in practical application, a neo-behavioristically oriented teacher strives to change behaviors of his students in the desired direction by providing the right stimuli at the proper time.[15]

Gestalt-field psychology originated in Germany early in this century. Its four outstanding leaders, Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler, Kurt Koffka, and Kurt Lewin, all came to the United States where they further developed their positions. Learning, according to this school, is closely related to perception, and the understanding of perception held by the Gestalt-field psychology is largely that outlined in the preceding chapter.

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[14] Ibid., pp. 46-61. [15] Ibid., p. 94.

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"Gestalt" is a German word meaning an organized pattern or configuration. Gestalt-field psychology attempts to describe the ways in which understanding is achieved in terms of wholes, forms, relationships, rather than atomistically.

> The Gestalt orientation is more interested in understanding how complex phenomena may be related meaningfully than in talking about stimuli and responses becoming connected. This does not mean that stimuli and responses are of no concern. They are viewed as subordinate rather than primary foci of attention. Instead of concentrating upon rigid stimulus-response connections, there is emphasis upon field organization, the relationship of parts and wholes as these are organized by the perceiving individual.[16]

Learning, then, is a purposive, explorative, imaginative, and creative enterprise. Insight is the key word for describing learning.

> Insights occur when an individual in pursuing his purposes, sees new ways of utilizing elements of his environment, including his own bodily structure. The noun learning connotes the new insights--or meanings--which are acquired.[17]

S-R associationist and Gestalt-field theories of learning all recognize and utilize perception, but with the former it is much more restricted both as to definition and importance.

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[16]Robert R. Boehlke, Theories of Learning in Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 69 f.

[17]Bigge, op. cit., p. 102.

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For the S-R associationist perception is a two-step process--sensing and deriving meaning. The first step, sensing, is an activity of the sense organs, analogous to taking photographs. Everything in one's environment exposed to the appropriately sensitive organs is indiscriminately recorded in the nervous system. Then derivation of meaning takes place, with selection or focusing upon particular items sensed being determined by previous conditioning.

A Gestalt-field psychologist, on the other hand, understands sensing and meaning to be conjoined. Selectivity--the determination of that which is sensed or perceived--is the product of meaning. The only objects in or aspects of a person's environment that he senses or attends to are those which have relevance or meaning to him in terms of his purposes. His sensitivity is to that which will help or hinder him, that which has, or appears to have, meaning for him. "Thus," as Bigge says, "a Gestalt-field psychologist sees perception as a unitary process, in which sensation hinges on meaning and meaning on sensation, and sensing and finding meaning occur simultaneously."[18]

In such an understanding of perception, relationship

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[18]Ibid., pp. 73 f.

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and organization are essential. Objects and factors are sensed and comprehended as they relate to the total situation. In the process of perception things are organized in the mind of the perceiver according to their relationships within their "field," which includes the thing perceived, the perceiver, and a complex background including not only other things but the purposes and previous experience of the perceiver.

These different understandings of the nature of perception and, particularly of the nature of the perceiver (for associationalists he is passive, acted upon by his environment; Gestalt-field psychology sees him as the active organizer of his perceptual world) lead to and mutually interact with different concepts of the nature of learning. S-R associationalists see it as habit formation, to be measured in terms of behavior. Thinking is not a process that leads to behavior, but behavior itself. B. F. Skinner, advocate of "operant conditioning," says: "Shakespeare's thought was his behavior with respect to his extremely complex environment," and, again, "In the broadest possible sense, the thought of Julius Caesar was simply the sum total of his responses to the complex world in which he lived."[19] Gestalt-field psychologists see

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[19]B. F. Skinner, Verbal Behavior (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957), p. 450, quoted in Bigge, op. cit. p. 141.

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learning as a change or reorganization of insight or cognitive structure.

> . . . In other words, it is a change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, values or beliefs, and may or may not have anything to do with change in overt behavior. One does not "learn by doing" except insofar as one's doing contributes to one's change in cognitive structure. For learning to occur, doing must be accompanied by realization of consequences. Thus, learning occurs through, and as a result of, experience. Learning, then, involves the catching, and generalization, of insights which often are first caught on a nonverbal level--the level of "feel"; they may be verbalized at the time of their catching, at some later time, or not at all.
>
> In learning, our tendency is to "generalize" our insights--to hypothesize, or get a hunch that they will work in other instances where conditions are similar. We then test the validity of these generalizations by trying them in active experiences. If they have no predictive value, they drop by the wayside. If they do have predictive value, they become a part of our intellectual make-up and contribute to intelligent behavior until they are changed or discarded.[20]

S-R associationism has made tremendous contributions to our understanding of habit formation, many of the relationships of initial perceptual stimuli and physiological response, the importance of reinforcement in establishing conduct, etc., and it has developed a most impressive accumulation of experimental validating evidence for its affirmations, but it seems to this writer that it does not begin to tell the entire learning story. Many important aspects of learning may be accounted for in

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[20]Bigge, op. cit., pp. 278 f.

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its terms, but its denial to the learner the ability to make an active contribution to his own learning seems to omit the most important part of the learning process. Jerome Bruner, defining education, says,

> Education seeks to develop the power and sensibility of the mind. On the one hand, the educational process transmits to the individual some part of the accumulation of knowledge, style, and values that constitutes the culture of a people. In doing so, it shapes the impulses, the consciousness, and the way of life of the individual. But education must also seek to develop the process of intelligence so that the individual is capable of goind beyond the cultural ways of his social world, able to innovate in however modest a way so that he can create an interior culture of his own. For whatever the act, the science, the literature, the history, and the geography of a culture, each man must be his own artist, his own scientist, his own historian, his own navigator. No person is master of the whole culture. . . . Each man lives a fragment of it. To be whole, he must create his own version of the world, using that part of his cultural heritage he has made his own through education.[21]

S-R associationalist theories may account for much, though not all, of the cultural transmission to which Bruner here refers, but it cannot account for--and actually denies--the learner's creating his own version of the world. Gestalt-field theories, oriented to perception as an organizing as well as a sensing activity of the mind, do attempt to explain this important creativity.

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[21]Jerome S. Bruner, "After John Dewey, What?" in his On Knowing (New York: Atheneum, 1966), pp. 115 f.

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## III. INTUITIVE THINKING

Gestalt-field understanding of perception has led to increasing awareness of the perceptual type of thinking and of its importance in learning and education. Bruner distinguishes between analytic and intuitive thinking. He writes,

> Analytic thinking characteristically proceeds a step at a time. Steps are explicit and usually can be adequately reported by the thinker to another individual. Such thinking proceeds with relatively full awareness of the information and operations involved. It may involve careful and deductive reasoning, often using mathematics or logic and an explicit plan of attack. Or it may involve a step-by-step process of induction and experiment, utilizing principles of research design and statistical analysis.
>
> In contrast to analytic thinking, intuitive thinking characteristically does not advance in careful, well-defined steps. Indeed, it tends to involve maneuvers based seemingly on an implicit perception of the total problem. The thinker arrives at an answer, which may be right or wrong, with little if any awareness of the process by which he reached it. He rarely can provide an adequate account of how he obtained his answer, and he may be unaware of just what aspects of the problem situation he was responding to. Usually intuitive thinking rests on familiarity with the domain of knowledge involved and with its structure, which makes it possible for the thinker to leap about, skipping steps and employing short cuts in a manner that requires a later rechecking of conclusions by more analytic means, whether deductive or inductive.[22]

Intuitive thinking appears to be a speeded-up, informal type of thinking, closely related to or identical

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[22]Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 57 f.

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with perception as Gestalt-field psychologists define it. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe analytic thinking as slowed-down, formalized, deliberate intuitive thinking or perception.

Certainly the two must complement each other. Intuitive thinking leads to solutions which might never be found if the only avenue were the lengthy, formal one of analytic thinking, but these "hunches" are not self-validating and require testing by the more deliberate method.

Bruner acknowledges that much remains to be learned about the nature of intuitive thinking, and much to be done if its value for education is to be recognized and exploited. Education is so often formalized that there seems little place for such procedures. Its worth for creativity and growth is suggested, however, when Bruner defines it:

> Intuition implies the act of grasping the meaning or significance or structure of a problem without implicit reliance on the analytic apparatus of one's craft. It is the intuitive mode that yields hypotheses quickly, that produces interesting combinations of ideas before their worth is known. It precedes proof; indeed, it is what the techniques of analysis and proof are designed to test and check. It is founded on a kind of combinatorial playfulness that is only possible when the consequences of error are not overpowering or sinful. Above all, it is a form of activity that depends upon confidence in the worthwhileness of the process (under consideration or investigation--in this instance Bruner is speaking of mathematical activity) rather than upon the importance of right answers at all times.[23]

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[23]Bruner, "On Learning Mathematics," in his On Knowing, p. 102.

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# CHAPTER VIII

## PERCEPTION AND REVELATION

Revelation as generally understood by leaders in religious thought today, and seen from the standpoint of the person experiencing it, is a perceptual experience, with perception here understood as not simply a sensing of data but an intuitive (as distinct from deliberate), meaning-producing correlation of data. It is an experience of more-or-less sudden awareness in which the deeper meanings and implications of one's total situation are discovered or appear to be "unveiled." Just as in the perception of an object, we quickly sense "not only its presence but its meaning, how it fits into its context and relates to us." In this chapter we shall attempt to relate insights of Niebuhr, Wieman, and Ebeling with respect to revelation to contemporary psychological understandings of perception.

### I. PERCEPTUAL DATA

Gestalt-field psychologists conceive of the perceptual stimulus situation as a perceptual field comprised of a <u>figure</u>--the predominating aspect of the situation as the perceiver senses it--and the <u>ground</u> or background, the less differentiated elements of that situation against or within which the figure is seen. "Figure" seems to be a

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particularly appropriate term to describe that which in the thought of Christian revelation has always been the focal element, the predominating factor giving rise to revelation, as a particular item or conglomerate of items constitutes the figure in a field of perceptual data. The figure of Jesus Christ appears as that through which revelation is made or received.

It is the event of Jesus Christ, rooted in historic happening, which our three contemporary theologians see as of focal importance for revelation. But Niebuhr and Ebeling find revelatory significance or stimulation not in the historic event (or events) of Jesus, but in figures of the mind which represent him to us. For Niebuhr, it is the symbolic image of Jesus Christ, based upon the historic Jesus but created anew in the imagination of the individual, which becomes "the intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible."[1] For Ebeling the historic event of Jesus becomes historical, the figure of Jesus becomes not simply something out of the past to be reported, but a word-event to be shared, a contemporary significance to be communicated. In the act of proclamation, of witness, the Jesus of history becomes the historical word-event, Jesus Christ, a living figure which leads us to confrontation

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[1]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 93.

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with God. For both men Scripture is instrumental to the creation of this image or word-event.

In Wieman's thought the figure of Christ is less stressed than the figure of the fellowship of Jesus, for he believes that God is actually to be seen in such creative fellowship, more so than in an individual. God, he feels, is the creating, transforming power released in such communicative interchange. The figure of Jesus and his early fellowship serves as a demonstration par excellence of what this fellowship is, and thus reveals the God who is constitutive of it. For Wieman revelation occurs when men sense God's presence, when creative interchange--which is God--takes place in conspicuous enough fashion to be noted and recognized by men. Hence revelation is not restricted to the particular fellowship enjoyed by Jesus and his companions, but qualitatively that fellowship was among the finest examples of God as creative interchange ever known. We have noted that Niebuhr, too, affirms that other subjects than the image of Christ may serve as instruments of revelation.

The <u>figure</u> of the event of Christ is seen in revelation against an extremely broad <u>ground</u>. It is not simply Jesus' background in history that is seen as ground (as it is not simply the historic Jesus who is seen as figure), but the totality of experience, of human events--man's basic

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situation--is the ground against which and in relation to which the figure or image of the Christ-event, with all its accumulated meanings, appears and upon which it casts light. It is at this point that revelation differs from most other perception. Most perception is sensory, a process of discovering the meaning or relationship of an object (the figure) within and to its environment (ground). Revelation is the perception of the meaning of a meaning to the totality of experience. In the revelation through Christ one perceives what the Christ-event (as a meaningful symbol) means to, or the meaning it gives to, the perceiver's own total life situation.

Ebeling suggests this when he speaks of "the context of the reality that encounters me,"[2] which under the revelatory stimulus of the word-event elicits the "hiddenness," the "radical questionableness" of this totality of reality which is God in confrontation with man.

Ebeling and Wieman both are emphatic in declaring that the God who is revealed is to be found within and not apart from this "ground" or "field" of the world. Niebuhr's emphasis upon the significance of "inner" or "our" history in revelation is indicative of the breadth of the "ground" of revelation-perception, including social,

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[2]Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 347.

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cultural, and historical elements as well as those solely related to individual experience.

## II. PROCESS AND DYNAMICS

The psychological processes involved in perception have been variously described by different persons, but those we have noted are generally in agreement as to the basic process being one of relating particulars which come to our attention to the totality of which they are a part, of discovering their meaning or place within the structure or structures to which they belong (or, possibly, of revising our understanding of the structure and relationship when new information acquired in the process so demands).

Niebuhr's descriptions of revelation as "the discovery of rational pattern" in life, and as the "reinterpretation of all our interpretations of life and death" is of the same nature. Revelation is perception written large, relating fundamental meanings, and the self itself, to the totality of existence and to God. Niebuhr's insight into the manner in which images and symbols function to help the mind integrate and interpret experiences is most significant. Bruner has noted how great organizing ideas perform such a function. He says,

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> . . . Knowledge is a model we construct to give meaning and structure to regularities in experience. The organizing ideas of any body of knowledge are inventions for rendering experience economical and connected. We invent concepts such as force in physics, the bond in chemistry, motives in psychology, style in literature as means to the end of comprehension.[3]

In similar fashion images, and particularly the image of Christ--but with greater emotional impact--help not only the mind to organize the data of experience, but the self to relate itself personally and meaningfully to the whole.

Ebeling's concept of man's linguisticality which leads him to confront "radical questionableness" not only about external reality but about himself and his relation to it, is another illustration of the perceptual process of searching for relationships and meanings, discovered, according to Ebeling, through faith--which answer comes with the same intuitive suddenness and sense of certainty as does "final perceptual organization."

Wieman's explanation of the way in which insight or intuition comes about is also very close to psychological explanations of perception. Innovation or radical originality, the first stage of this process, is related to the discrimination of a figure in a field. Integration, the

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[3]Jerome S. Bruner, On Knowing (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 120.

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other stage, is comparable to Solley and Murphy's "trial and check" and "final perceptual organization" stages in perception. Wieman also notes the emotive aspects which often follow upon integration, as do several of the psychologists with respect to the consequences of perception.

Not only may we observe similarities in the process of perception and revelation, but the dynamics which operate to bring these processes about may also be related. We saw how Hilgard has pointed out two underlying goals of perception: the achievement of environmental stability and the achievement of definiteness. Michael Polanyi has written in much the same vein:

> . . . the urge to look out for clues and to make sense of them is ever alert in our eyes and ears, and in our fears and desires. The urge to understand experiences, together with the language referring to experience, is clearly an extension of this primordial striving for intellectual control. The shaping of our conceptions is impelled to move from obscurity to clarity and from incoherence to comprehension, by an intellectual discomfort similar to that by which our eyes are impelled to make clear and coherent the things we see. In both cases we pick out clues which seem to suggest a context in which they make sense as its subsidiary particulars.[4]

One thinks here of Niebuhr's statement, "The heart must reason; the participating self cannot escape the necessity of looking for pattern and meaning in its life

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[4]Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 100.

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and relations."[5] (He then goes on to show how revelation through the symbolic image of Christ provides the means for the heart's deepest understandings.) Hilgard's perceptual goal of attaining environmental stability is almost duplicated in Niebuhr's definition of revelation as "an event which elicits the confidence of selves in their ultimate environment."[6]

In his decided emphasis upon the centrality of faith in revelation Ebeling is saying the same thing. For Wieman "faith in the sense of commitment to creativity generates insight"[7] and revelation, he says, is insight. Ebeling seems to minimize the role of the self in this, with his emphasizing the passivity of the self in the faith encounter, while Wieman seems to stress human action in this regard. Yet for Ebeling faith is the "actualization" of revelation, while Wieman makes clear that creativity, to which faith is commitment, is divine action, involving selves but more than human. In either case, as is also true of environmental stability, faith is an end and not a means.

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[5]Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 108.

[6]H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1903, 1960), p. 47.

[7]Henry Nelson Wieman, Man's Ultimate Commitment (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 143.

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The perceptual goal of definiteness is also involved in Ebeling's "radical questionableness" and in Wieman's "creative communication" in which, in the mutual search for more definitive understandings, insights arise. In view of this goal, one can understand why so often in the history of thought about revelation, revelation has been identified with some propositional formulation, some specific word or words, for in such fixed structures of thought things seem to be well tied-down and made definite.

Perception psychologists have noted the dynamic influence of social and cultural factors determining our perceptions. All three theologians here considered also emphasize these influences with respect to revelation. Niebuhr and Ebeling both concentrate interest in the influences of history, Wieman stressing particularly the socio-historical factors while Ebeling's thought comes to focus in hermeneutic, in which history, tradition and the contemporary influence of witness and interpretation join. For Wieman revelation is the product of a social act--creative communication and interchange.

## III. CONTENT AND CONSEQUENCES

Perception includes a final stage of organization, structuring and relating elements within the perceptual field, yet as perception this is seldom verbalized or really

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formalized. This occurs after that which has been perceived is subjected to the more deliberate probings of reason. It is perhaps more important to note that perceptions that have "arrived" are, as Bruner points out, hypotheses. And as hypotheses they are working, active hypotheses--to be tested either by reason or experience, or both. This is so because our perceptions are limited to the things that concern us, that we need or want to act upon.

Revelation has often been spoken of as having content, and this has frequently been conceived as being propositional and quite arbitrary. Contemporary theology generally denies this, and our three thinkers particularly reject this notion of revelation. Yet the "content" of revelation for them, though it may not be formalized in such a way, is a "working hypothesis"--a call to faith and decision, a call to restructure one's own life and being in terms of a new understanding of the totality of life and being. Metanoia, "creative transformation," "commitment" are terms these men use to describe the content and the consequences of revelation.

Another way of looking at the "content" of revelation is in terms of the quality of that which is experienced in revelation. Wieman often speaks of "qualitative meaning" and "appreciative understanding," and, though the

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latter usually refers to other persons, the whole has to do with the felt quality accompanying these occasions in which God is revealed in and as creative interchange. For Ebeling even revelation will not enable us to make objectifying statements about God, but our experience of him, as of the world about us, may be lifted through faith to new qualities of meaningfulness, as suggested when he spoke of bread as "eloquent bread." For all three men God is experienced in revelation as personal, yet this is a qualitative attribute rather than a description of God as a person.

Apprehension, through revelation, of the selfhood of God leads, according to Niebuhr, to a new apprehension and appraisal of one's own self.[8] This is reminiscent of what psychology suggests as to the interrelationship of perception and the self-concept. The way one sees himself has much to do with what one perceives (accepts) about his environment, while at the same time the way one perceives his environment, as facilitating or threatening, affects his perception of himself. Niebuhr suggests that a sense of being known and valued by a God who is a self (one's ultimate environment) results in the emergence of a self free from fear and confusion. The "personlike integrity"

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[8]Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 152 f.

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of God elicits development of an integrated, responsible selfhood.[9] Responsibility is reflected and expressed in the social scene in accountability ("the agent who stays with his action, who accepts the consequences in the form of reactions and looks forward in a present deed to the continued interaction") and social solidarity ("a continuous discourse or interaction among beings forming a continuing society").[10]

Ebeling, like Wieman, is convinced that God can be apprehended only within the world of events. He thus sees that social relationships lead to both consciousness of selfhood (a point Niebuhr also emphatically makes[11]) and responsibility, and these in turn produce the linguisticality in terms of which God is encountered. He says,

> It is no chance that precisely the fundamental ethical category 'responsibility' with its implied forum-structure of being compelled to render account . . . brings us to the linguisticality of man. . . . Responsibility to God is intelligible only in, and not alongside, responsibility to ourselves and therefore only in, and not alongside, responsibility to our fellows. . . .[12]

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[9]Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, p. 47.

[10]Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 63 ff.

[11]Ibid., p. 69.

[12]Gerhard Ebeling, "Theology and the Evidentness of the Ethical," Journal for Theology and the Church, II (1965), 118.

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A person's perceptions of himself, of other persons and the world about them, of God are all interrelated and interdependent. When, with the aid of the image of Jesus Christ, all of these varied elements merge into a great perception which we call revelation, the outcome, the consequence is the creation, development, actualization of a dialogical person, a responsible self. This is metanoia, creative transformation, realized through man's linguisticality in creative communication. Herein God is revealed. As Wieman says, "God as revealed in Jesus Christ is the transforming, saving power of . . . communication which creates appreciative understanding of one another and transmits the values of one to another."[13]

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[13]Henry Nelson Wieman, Intellectual Foundation of Faith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), p. 35.

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# CHAPTER IX

## REVELATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

> Learning is not the grasp or mastery of isolated facts. It is the perception of the interdependence of facts and life. It is a thought process which enables the learner to discover meaning through flashes of insight and by reflecting, interpreting, and translating knowledge into daily living.[1]

With slight alteration Pepronia Merjanian's definition of learning could become a definition of revelation. Revelation is a perception of the interdependence of the mighty acts of God, of the event of Jesus Christ, and my life. Flashes of insight pave the way for reflection, interpretation, and the translation of knowledge into meaning and commitment to a way of life.

If revelation is so related to learning, if it is a special type of perceptual learning--the most special because it has to do with the deepest meanings and commitments--then Christian education had better understand and concern itself with it. Since, however, as biblical thought and that of contemporary theologians suggests, revelation is not a matter of propositional knowledge but of dialogically achieved transforming insight, it in itself cannot be taught as content or subject matter. On the

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[1]Pepronia Merjanian, The Joy of Teaching (Boston: United Church Press, 1966), p. 41.

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other hand, everything that is properly the subject matter of Christian learning (and what could be excluded here?) may function as a factor either of the "subject" or of the "ground" of the perceptual Gestalt which constitutes revelation. Christian education's task with respect to revelation, then, is an enabling task--making it possible for persons to have such experience by helping to provide the necessary "raw materials" of knowledge and experience, utilizing and improving upon the context in the socio-historical setting wherein such experience occurs, and being prepared with devices and techniques to stimulate and foster intuitive thinking.

Somehow the sense of wonder must be maintained in all of this. The self-disclosure of God, the relating of the individual to the many-faceted universe and to God's intention and potentiation in all of this, the apprehension of and focusing upon ultimate meaning and concern--these are events and experiences that mold and revolutionize the lives of persons and of societies. Little wonder that revelation has so often been thought to be a supernatural occurrence, a "bolt from the blue" of an other-worldly realm of spiritual reality. But its effect is in this world, as through this experience persons grasp the meaning and relationship of God and his mighty acts to their life and this life, and its locale is within the processes of

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thought and feeling of the "recipients" of revelation. Nonetheless, awe and wonder are the only fitting responses to this experience, for here we stand in vivid awareness of the mighty historical revelatory acts of a mighty God, whose presence is now mightily revealed in the reality of our own climactic experience of understanding.

Expectancy must be the watchword of the educator in this regard. He must expect revelatory experience to occur for his pupils, and he must expect that it will elicit wonder as it produces metanoia. And he must expect that his teaching efforts will have had something to do with all this! Pedagogical routines are inevitable--and deadly--when, simply because they are routine, we cease to expect significant results from them. Great expectations will help even routines to be productive of revelatory events in the minds and experiences of our pupils.

## I. WITNESS

At the outset it is the responsibility of Christian education to expose the learner to relevant facts and ideas which he may relate to life or utilize in relating other facts and ideas to the totality of his experience, whether in normal learning or revelation experience. Perception and meanings are built upon multitudinous facts and ideas, previous learnings, perceptions, and hypotheses.

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Anything that may enter into human experience or cognizance could be considered an appropriate subject matter for Christian education, but from a practical standpoint limits must be set. Thinking in terms of revelation potential, subject matter for Christian education might be regarded as all that which, in reasonably significant fashion, may serve as divine self-disclosure. This would include events in nature, in history, in contemporary life, in individual or social experience, any event or circumstance in which what God means may be discovered or communicated. Such events, being communicative of God's being and reality, may be termed Word of God. Sharing knowledge of these events and insights gained from them is witness to the Word.

Supreme among such events, of course, is the event of Jesus Christ, or events directly related to him (cf. Wieman's "Jesus and his fellowship"). Through the years Christians have also found other biblical events especially provocative of God-related meanings, and these, along with the record, the Bible itself, have also been termed Word of God.

As Ebeling points out, however, it is never sufficient to merely recite the Word of God, to recount in a purely objective fashion the events of God's self-disclosure. They cease to be God's self-disclosure unless the

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hearer is enabled to make them relevant to his own life. Nels Ferre says, "If the Bible is God's living Word to men, God's living means of communication rather than a matter of static words and fixed meanings, to be genuinely Biblical is to find the proper words in the present for the eternal Word."[2]

Finding the right word is not simply a matter of vocabulary. It also demands the courage to challenge the learner, and to become involved with him, in the confrontation of the difficult and the genuinely problematic--whether an immediate personal or social situation of evil, or Ebeling's "radical questionableness,"--and to be open to God's word for this. Roger Schinn distinguishes between "nurture" and "exposure" in Christian education. Nurture is essential for the development of internal security and personality, surrounding and supporting the young learner with love and protection. But maturity awaits exposure and response to the harsh realities of experience. Schinn writes,

> If Christian education emphasizes nurture apart from exposure, it misses its mission. On the one hand, it may produce "hothouse Christians"--persons who know the tenderness but not the courage of Christian faith, churchmen who cannot maintain the faith when the world's chill winds strike. These are the virtuous youths who go to pieces when they leave home for school or the army. Their virtue has been the innocence of

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[2]Nels F. S. Ferre, A Theology for Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 112.

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> inexperience, not the purity of Jesus, who conquered temptation. On the other hand, such one-sided nurture may draw people into a cozy-in-group that never focuses upon the disturbing demands of God. It may then encourage them in adjustment to a church that is already so well-adjusted to society that it can never confront the comforts and idolatries of America with the God of Jesus Christ.[3]

This does not mean, however, that Christian education must restrict itself to a "problem-centered" approach, or that the selection of biblical material for use in teaching be determined exclusively by specific problems being confronted. Lewis J. Sherrill says that in doing this "the Bible is reduced to the level of utility and is asked to justify itself before public opinion in a practical-minded Western culture. It is no longer a spokesman for the living God, facing our day with judgment and with mercy."[4] Iris Cully suggests that Christian education should be "existence-centered" rather than "experience--(or problem) centered." "Existence," she says, "comprises a totality--not the self by itself, but the self in relationship to others, things, the universe, and history."[5] While we must never ignore the problems of the individual

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[3]Roger L. Schinn, The Educational Mission of Our Church (Boston: United Church Press, 1962), p. 59.

[4]Lewis J. Sherrill, The Gift of Power (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 181 f.

[5]Iris Cully, The Dynamics of Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 119.

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and the possible relevance of some biblical material to the problems, we want him to see himself and his problems not in isolation--wherein they become overwhelming--but as participating in the human predicament, wherein answers have been found in the past and mutual help is available in the present. Sherrill says the themes of the Bible are persistent aspects of revelation, directed toward human predicament.[6] Christian education must expose the learner to these themes that he may be prepared for confrontation with the problems of his human situation, and with God, when such confrontation comes. Sara Little writes,

> . . . Teachers may feel frustrated or guilty if they do not see evidence of confrontation at every session of the Sunday church school. Perhaps this calls for a more precise theoretical clarification of the function of Christian-education in relationship to confrontation. When such clarification comes, both theorists and laymen must recognize the role of education in providing a basic knowledge of the Bible, or what Clarence Tucker Craig calls the factual presentation of the record of revelation. There need be no apology for the presentation of the bases of the gospel faith, although information is never presented solely for the sake of information.
>
> The teacher's hope and expectation is that these will be occasions in which information about the Bible, the subject matter discussed in classes, will be caught up and transformed into the meaning possible only when one is aware of God's self-communication. Such an encounter cannot be contrived by the teacher; it is the work of the Holy Spirit and affects the teacher as

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[6]Sherrill, op. cit., p. 177.

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> much as the student. And confrontation need not occur within the walls of the church building, although that to which the church witnesses is responsible for confrontation.[7]

The importance of making this broad "factual presentation of the record of revelation" does not excuse us from the necessity of making these historical events speak also, as Ebeling says, as present event. We need not expect an immediate intense confrontation with God, but the biblical events will not speak at all, will not be learned, unless they are seen as relevant. Iris Cully suggests a methodology for accomplishing this which she terms "participation."[8] It is particularly appropriate to presentation of the Bible, for the Bible is primarily a record of events rather than of ideas. One can speculate *about* ideas, but one tends to be drawn *into* events--and it is the sense of being "drawn into" that is sought here. This is accomplished in part by helping the learner develop a consciousness that biblical history is what Niebuhr would call "our" history, and that learning of it is a type of "remembering" which serves to make it contemporaneous. Corporate acts of celebration in the church, as well as recounting the stories, help us to remember. Another important aspect of

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[7]Sara Little, *The Role of the Bible in Christian Education* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961), pp. 167 f.

[8]Cully, *op. cit.*, pp. 119 ff.

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the methodology is careful consideration of each learner's situation--his needs, development, relationships, etc., but particularly how he perceives himself and feels about himself and his life situation.

> The task of Christian nurture is to put his present experiences in a context that will give him something to remember. He will remember that which has relevance, and will participate in those events and persons in the past history of the church which will help and sustain him.
>
> When he can see his needs and problems against those of Biblical persons, he has a focus beyond himself from which to view himself. . . .
>
> Although one may begin with the existential situation of the child, this receives historical depth as it is seen in the context of other lives, which are made contemporary by the fact that they too have shared with us both in the need for and in the receiving of the saving grace of God.[9]

Christian education, to enable revelation, will not only utilize the witness of the Bible to the Word of God, and serve as witness to the meanings disclosed therein, it will also utilize other witnesses to the Word. One type of such witness which is and merits being much more extensively used is the witness of theology. This "truth-about-God-in-relation-to-man," as Randolph C. Miller defines it,[10] is a product of revelation. Whereas the Bible

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[9]Ibid., pp. 130 ff.

[10]Randolph Crump Miller, Biblical Theology and Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 5.

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records events in which divine self-disclosure took place, theology is studied human interpretation of what this disclosure means. It is the insightful perceptions of revelation experience put to the tests of reason and experience and systematic formulation. Laymen have often looked upon theology as something arbitrary and complicated, fixed and foreboding, and have left this study to scholars and the clergy. But increasingly, with a growing concern and interest in adult Christian education, there is demand for and opportunity to use the witness of theology to the meanings of faith. Comparative studies of different theologians should foster awareness that theology is interpretation of meaning, and should make students of theology more open to making their own interpretations of experience and thus more open to the experience of revelation.

Liturgy and corporate celebration is another type of witness-the witness of the worshiping community--to revelation. As Iris Cully observed, remembrance of God's mighty salutary acts is focal in such observance, and the active and corporate nature of such worship experiences provides a context and feeling-tone of great dynamic quality. The fact that it is worship is of most importance in terms of revelation-potential, for revelation is above all personal encounter with the divine selfhood. Christian

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education dare not ignore this witness. Though it cannot "use" worship (making it a tool would destroy it), it can be concerned with providing meaningful opportunities for, and with the quality of such corporate experiences.

Another type of witness to God's Word, a most important witness to the meaning and implications of faith, is that of the ethical and moral behavior patterns of the community of the faithful. The type of human and social concerns manifested, the consistency with which verbal affirmations are translated into conduct, the support and encouragement given by the community to individuals who sincerely try to measure up to its standards are crucial forms of witness. Christian education must be concerned not only with transmitting standards and patterns of behavior and conduct, and appreciation for these, but with the much more difficult task of determining, in this rapidly changing world, what is the most appropriate conduct now, in this situation. The insight of revelation is often called for here, and the witness of the lives of those who have been faithful will guide such insight.

Of utmost potential importance is the witness of the individual to what has been revealed to him, to his perception of the meanings of faith and life. The teacher will see this as an opportunity not only to give expression to his own feelings and insights or to transmit his

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conceptions of matters of central importance, but to engage with the learner in the creativity of communication, a process which in itself may be revelatory--and to both parties to the dialogue. Perhaps we should say that when dialogue becomes creative communication it becomes trialogue--God enters the "conversation" to disclose himself.

## II. ACTUALIZATION THROUGH COMMUNICATION

Dialogical creativity is a very important part of Christian education's function of enabling the experience of revelation. The act of communication or witness (which is communication with feeling) not only provides the teacher opportunity to share with the learner(s) insightful ideas which may be provocative of eventual revelatory development, but in the communicative interchange between them such development may actually proceed to fruition. Formulation, confirmation, actualization of revelation may occur as the pupil seeks to give expression to his own thoughts and understandings in his conversations with his teacher and with other learners.

We have seen how Wieman attributes intuition to the "mind-stretching" which occurs when persons engage in creative interchange, and intuition is the first step in apprehending revelation. And for Ebeling man's linguisticality opens the mind and paves the way for revelation.

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But communication or speech does more than generate insight. It serves to bring to expression, to give form to, to confirm ideas which may be revelatory. Merleau-Ponty has written,

> If speech presupposed thought, if telling were primarily a matter of meeting the object through a cognitive intuition or through a representation, we could not understand why thought tends toward expression as towards its completion, why the most familiar thing appears indeterminate as long as we have not called its name, why the thinking subject himself is in a kind of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself, or even spoken or written them, as is shown by the example of so many writers who begin a book without knowing exactly what they are going to put in it. A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it will not even exist for itself.[11]

Polanyi points out something recognized by both Heidegger and Ebeling--that speech not only "points" or refers to certain things, but makes us aware of the way these things are constituted in themselves and in their relationships. "We can never learn to speak," he says, "except by learning what is meant."[12] He goes on to show that knowledge so acquired always involves commitment, an element of personal passion, for the self has been involved

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[11]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 177.

[12]Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 101.

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in its creation. ". . . into every act of knowing there enters a tacit and passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known and . . . this coefficient is no mere imperfection, but a necessary component of all knowledge."[13]

Iris Cully links communication to recognition or insight. We saw how she advocated "participation" as a method to be used or goal to be sought in the teaching of the biblical events. Participation may lead then to "recognition," an insightful perceptual experience which is an encounter with God, "the point at which the person hears his name called by God and makes reply."[14] This is also an act of appropriation, the response through which one appropriates faith and makes it his own. But such recognition and commitment seeks formulated expression, she says, and the expression is communication. Christian apologetic, creeds, symbols are all forms of such expression and communication which the church uses, but Christian education must be diligent in the use of other individually expressive means of communication, such as conversation, discussion, witness, questions, and various types of composition ("creative" activity, music, pictures, drama, writing, etc.), with an awareness of why these devices are

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[13] Ibid., p. 312. [14] Cully, op. cit., p. 143.

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being used. Too often such procedures are used as a matter of course, the teacher merely seeking "feed back" of the content which he has sought to impart, rather than expecting that these procedures will be productive of something genuinely creative, or that they may be instruments for the actualization of revelation.

More significant than devices and techniques are the persons and relationships of the teacher and learner as they engage in creative communication. Perhaps the most vivid portrayal of the possibilities of such encounter is that provided by Ross Snyder in what he terms, "the ministry of meanings."[15] Such a ministry is one of relationship in which significant conversation takes place. "It is not chit-chat, exchanging pleasantries, current opinion and gossip. It is encounter. Which means that it is dialectic--the play of mind upon mind, of experience upon experience, until a happy explosion of fresh thought takes place."[16]

Such meaning-nurturing conversation may take place between just two persons (here, perhaps, most fruitfully), or in small, intimate groups, or in larger groups--especially when members are exposed to one another over an

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[15]Ross Snyder, The Ministry of Meaning (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches and World Council of Christian Education, 1961), pp. 13-30.

[16]Ibid., p. 20.

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extended period of time and in an atmosphere of intensified concern, as at a retreat. Snyder distinguishes three styles of such conversation. In one of these the teacher is, as Socrates suggested, a "midwife," assisting in the intellectual birthing process through an intelligent sensitivity and responsiveness to the mental and emotional struggles and labors of the youthful pupil--yet the meanings brought to life are the product and possession of the learner. "Mating" is another style, in which teacher and student, or students, share together both ideas and experiences, with all their feeling tones. "The intention is co-creation. To talk together long enough that something new emerges, and both are parents."[17] The third style--a sort of combination of the other two--Snyder calls "diving," with one party to the conversation leading off in a venturesome leap into meaning, and the other not merely watching or cheering on, but joining in the sport.

Such conversation is the creative communication of which Wieman speaks. In this human act God expresses and displays himself. As Ebeling insists, this awareness is an act of faith--faith in a God who manifests himself to us only in terms of the events and relationships of the world of our experience. In the word-event occasioned by such

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[17]Ibid., p. 27.

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meaningful dialogue and relationship between teacher and pupil, faith is elicited and, through it, the actualization of revelation occurs. Here there is twofold revelation, for God is revealed in the very act of such conversation as Snyder describes, and a further revelation may also be found in the meaning-content which is produced in such creative communication.

Thus communication--the educator's principal tool--both spawns revelation and brings it to expression. Christian teachers are favored instruments of or participants in the divine self-disclosure as they engage in creative dialogue with their pupils. Their challenge is to keep themselves open to and aware of the opportunities that are theirs to be so used by God, and to keep their dialogical skills and sensitivities sharp. In all this they must remain humble so that they are not tempted to force even their own "revelations" upon their pupils, but rather effectively persuade them to so give voice to their own growing understandings that they themselves arrive at momentous meanings with the full impact of revelational discovery.

## III. CONTEXT AND COMMITMENT

Revelation never takes place in isolation. While it may be the experience of an individual, that individual and the experience are set in a context. In fact, elements of

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the context enter into the very being of the person, and, since revelation has to do with the orientation of the self to its basic situation, the context enters into the revelation itself.

The most important elements in a person's context are not physical, geographical, etc., though these are of great significance. Most important with respect to learning, to the creation of meaning, to the experience of revelation are the socio-historical factors. A person is a human being, a socius, living in a particular history. Charles R. Stinnette, Jr. says,

> Learning is not simply an individual affair. One learns through participation in the paideia of a corporate life. This process is rooted in the capacity of the social matrix to shape, by its own sense of identity and value, the habits, powers, and consciousness of a person. Learning is both social and genetic--an integral part of a total, lived experience. The ancient dictum of Galen that "man is a whole with his environment" is gradually gaining acceptance in modern psychology--despite that discipline's long domination by an individualistic viewpoint. The human being functions with a psycho-social identity from the moment of his birth. His helplessness and his potential for learning accentuate the social character of becoming.[17]

Niebuhr, Ebeling, and Wieman all empnasize the importance of man's social nature and his place in the social scene. Wieman's orientation is more to the present and future, focusing upon the development of community and its

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[17]Charles R. Stinnette, Jr., Learning in Theological Perspective (New York: Association Press, 1951), p. 52.

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significance for growth in goodness, while Niebuhr and Ebeling have a greater consciousness of the significance of the historical and of man's participation in history with respect to how men feel and respond in the present. Niebuhr's insights into the profound significance and role of "inner" history in the development of responsible selfhood deserve careful consideration.

This issue is of crucial importance in this day of the "generation gap," of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with "the establishment," of social estrangement. The profound perceptual experiences we call revelation have most often been "triggered" by events in "our" history; persons have found themselves and their places in life by identifying with the images of personages in "our" history; God has been encountered in the context of "our" history. But alienation in contemporary society is destroying the sense of "our" in history, and this not only makes inaccessible to that segment of society which feels alienated the treasured events and personages of the past, but deprives them of their psychological home in the present. Stinnette writes,

> Man is a social creature with propensities for individualism. His personal identity is defined at the point of intersection between internal and external history. He must have a place to stand--a

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> nurturing habitation. It is from within this habitation that he is enabled to affirm both his membership in and his independence of society.[18]

The answer to this problem of social estrangement lies, for the church, in part, in a renewed emphasis upon the historical, an emphasis which Christian education can help provide. This must not be a turning away from the problems of the present, but an effort to gain a better perspective with respect to them. The church will then be seen to be the community and abode of the faithful, who in faithfulness to the revelation they had received were able, as Ebeling suggests, to transform identity into variability, to proclaim a timeless gospel in timely fashion, to devise new structures to meet new situations, to go again and again the way of death and resurrection. This will be of little comfort to those who prefer to have the church leave them, itself, and society undisturbed, but it may persuade some that the true community of Christ is not static but lives and breathes, acting and interacting in a changing world.

The history of the people of God has been, perhaps above all else, a history of renewal, reconstruction, even rebellion. The people who "made" that history--prophets, seers, saints, reformers, even Jesus himself--have been

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[18] Ibid., p. 16.

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those who saw things in a new light, who understood and responded to life-situations in a new way, and, generally, believed their new insight to be based upon revelation. Awareness of this characteristic of church history should serve to foster revelation-type learning, for such experience is rooted in what Wieman terms "innovating ideas," the ability to discover and discriminate novelty in a situation.

The community of Jesus Christ has been able to renew itself, to meet changing situations, to contemporize itself while remaining faithful to its tradition when it has been most conscious that it was the community of Jesus Christ. The image of Jesus Christ, as Niebuhr affirms, alone enables us, as individuals and as a community, to adequately relate ourselves and our institutions to the world and society about us. Loyalty to Christ precludes loyalty to a customary way of doing things. Loyalty to Christ compels confrontation with God and, by his grace, realistic confrontation with the situations before us.

In much of the contemporary church, however, the image of Jesus Christ is a neglected image. Our Christocentrism is often in name only. We still call ourselves Christian. Jesus' life and teachings still serve as the basis or as illustrative material for much of the preaching and pronouncement of the church. We still attempt to interpret and apply the ethics of Jesus in the moral and

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social issues we face. We still pray (or, at least, say) "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Yet there is no longer as extensive and intensive a focusing upon Jesus as the central figure in terms of whom immediate decisions are made and life patterns established, as there once was. "Decision for Christ"--once the objective of both preaching and teaching--is seldom, if ever, considered in may quarters today.

Much of this contemporary "neglect" of Christ represents a fundamentally healthy reaction against a shallow and sentimental pietism which really obscured the meaning and relevance of Christ for life. Often, too, this neglect is really an avoidance, due to the impatience, unwillingness or inability of the preacher or teacher to present Christ as present event--to contemporize the historical Christ. The "quest for the historical Jesus" of a few years ago, and the biblical scholars' conclusions that no absolutely definitive picture of the Jesus of history is available to us, has also caused some to abandon the effort to construct a meaningful image of Christ.

But we need this image, we need this focus of loyalty and commitment and understanding. Life requires a pattern and model, a symbolic image, as Niebuhr has shown, about which to integrate and organize and make intelligible all the factors, sensations, and occasions of

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experience, and the image of Jesus Christ most adequately and meaningfully serves this end. In this image we also find a personalized focus for the most important and meaningful commitments of life. Values, ideals, objectives may possibly be stated in abstract terms, but they compel our ultimate loyalty and devotion only when they are personalized through an image which enables us to sense an intimate, personal relationship to them.

Christian education should be a major factor in providing persons with this image of Jesus Christ, and in restoring it to the central position it has held through most of Christian history. An awareness of the importance of this image for the structuring of Christian life and personality should be accompanied by a recognition on the part of educators of the fact that it is an image which serves this end. The precise image of Jesus Christ will vary from person to person and within various communities of the Christian faith, according to the background of history, emphases and approach of the person or of the group to which he belongs. The social, mental, and emotional context in which a person develops and finds himself has much to do with the nature of the images he adopts and upon which he patterns his life and thought.

The image of Jesus Christ held by one who commits himself to Christ is a composite of what he knows or

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believes of the historical figure of Jesus, plus a whole complex of ideas and ideals, emotional and motivational factors, varying considerably from person to person, but possessed of qualitative characteristics related to the highest and best that person has experienced, thought, or imagined. As Ebeling suggests, the Jesus of faith is not just a historical figure but a language-event giving expression to some of the deepest meanings of experience, as testified to in the proclamation of the church through the years.

While it is impossible for us to present a historical portrait of Jesus with unquestioned exactitude at any one point, enough is known of the quality of his life and teaching and of his impact upon persons and society that this historical figure can and does serve as the basis for myriad personally conceived images of Jesus Christ, varying from individual to individual, but sufficiently unified that we cannot only speak of the image of Jesus Christ, but find in it the basis of a world-wide, time-encompassing community of Jesus Christ.

One of Christian education's most important tasks is to help the pupil discover and create (there must be elements of both in the process) his own image of Jesus Christ, an image of such reality and relevance for him that it becomes a focus of commitment for his life. The

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point in an individual's life at which such an image takes shape and assumes critical relevancy may well be an experience of revelation such as we have described. Illumined by Christ, the person is enabled to see himself in his actual and potential relationship to his "context," his total situation, and to discern the meaning and relevance of the divine for the shaping of his life and that of the world about him.

Since the symbolic image of Jesus Christ is such a comprehensive image, it is not enough for the educator to concern himself simply with the presentation of a biblical or historic Jesus. All the factors of experience and idealism, of ethics and responsibility to which the Christ may be relevant (and it is the comprehensiveness of his relevance, the way he speaks to almost every situation, that convinces us that he is the Word of God)--all these relevancies are properly the concern and subject matter of Christian education. The pupil's commitment to Christ is a valid objective of the teacher, but it must be an informed and knowledgeable commitment, capable of expressing itself in thought and conduct by detailing that in the pupil's particular situation and society his commitment means this, and this, and this.

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## IV. ENABLING

Revelation cannot be produced at will and certainly no teacher can cause it to happen for one of his pupils, just as he cannot learn for the pupil. All the educator can do is to attempt to provide the conditions and relationships in which learning and the experience of revelation are most likely to occur, to fulfill an enabling function.

We have noted the type of thinking Bruner calls "intuitive thinking" as distinct from "analytic thinking," and how the experience of revelation appears to be an instance of this type of perceptual thought, one leading to the deepest and most crucial meanings. It would seem that fostering this kind of thinking might be productive of revelation experience. But so far, as Bruner points out, about all we can do is ask questions about this style of thinking. Not enough investigation has been made, not enough is known to provide any real guidance regarding the stimulation and furthering of this kind of thought. Bruner does make one suggestion, however. "It seems likely that effective intuitive thinking is fostered by the development of self-confidence and courage in the student."[19] Such thinking, he goes on to say, may be proved

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[19]Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education (New

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wrong when put to the test of more analytical procedures, and thus requires a thinker who is not afraid to make honest mistakes in the effort to solve problems.

Self-confidence and courage belong to the person who knows where he is, where he belongs, how he fits into the total scheme of things, what his relationships are. He is Ebeling's man of faith who has faced up to radical questionableness and in the event of revelation in Jesus has found life's meaning. Certainly many have not attained this experience, especially those of younger years with whom Christian educators are greatly concerned. Yet these, too, can be developing self-confidence and courage, and can be helped to do so, through encouragement of their own questioning. They may not yet be ready to cope with "radical" questionableness, the mystery of reality, but their curiosity about life and the world about them can be excited, and, in turn, their perceptiveness, their ability to "see" meanings and relationships enhanced. Such persons live more deeply, experience more fully, become more confident. Estvan and Estvan characterize them in this way:

> The perceptive person really "lives." He sees more in life and, as a consequence, he lives more richly. For him nothing is without significance. Everything is part of the mosaic of life, and he delights in discovering the pattern. Attuned to the world, he can

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York: Random House, 1960), p. 65.

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> adapt to changes. Whether they be personal or social, he perceives problems realistically, and because he does his solutions are more likely to be adequate.[20]

Such a person will be more ready to confront "radical questionableness," to be open to divine self-disclosure, to experience revelation when the time for this is ripe because he is in the habit of seeking meanings and discovering relationships. And persons can be taught to be perceptive when education focuses upon finding and creating meaning. This should certainly characterize Christian education, when even secular education recognizes this goal. The 1962 report of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development of the National Education Association states:

> The classroom must become a place where the exciting experience of exploring and discovering meaning is the central activity. If the objective of instruction becomes that of perception building, students may become aware of, or sensitive to, the importance of meaning. In this way they learn about learning. They learn how perceptions or meanings are broadened or changed and how they are built. They learn how to learn.[21]

At this point secular and public education can augment Christian education without becoming involved with doctrinal teaching, and Christian educators can reinforce

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[20]Frank J. and Elizabeth W. Estvan, The Child's World (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 286.

[21]"Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming," report of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development of the National Education Association, Washington, 1962), p. 70.

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public educators by using their influence to see that provision is made for teaching of this nature and quality in the public schools. The same emphasis, of course, must characterize the church school classroom, but we must also make every effort, through parent and adult education, preaching, and every other avenue to assure that in the principal "classroom" for religious education, the home, there is a concern for developing perceptual awareness and understanding of meanings and relationships. This calls for development of family environments in which there is both questioning and appreciative perception and sensitivity to the immediate world about us, and a possessive comprehension of "our" heritage and history to which contemporary events may be related.

Finally, as Wieman points out, the church, the family, and other communities in society have the privilege of providing conditions favorable for creative interchange, for insight-producing dialogue and communication between persons. Here not only man but God is enabled to produce meanings, to bring revelation to pass. The church is particularly equipped to bring about such communication because it is usually structured into small groups, and person-to-person, pupil-teacher, or pastor-layman relationships are ideally expected, whether they actually take place or not. "A ministry of meanings," as Ross Snyder

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calls it, can be provided which may well be or be productive of revelation.

In the closing pages of I and Thou, Martin Buber wrote:

> . . . revelation does not pour itself into the world through him who receives it as through a funnel; it comes to him and seizes his whole elemental being in all its particular nature, and fuses with it. The man, too, who is the "mouth" of the revelation, is indeed this, not a speaking tube or any kind of instrument, but an organ, which sounds according to its own laws; and to sound means to modify.[22]

Understanding revelation as a perceptual process by which crucial meanings and relationships are comprehended means for the Christian educator involved in a ministry of meanings that he is an instrument of creative transformation and that both he and his pupils are subject to and released for such metanoia that follows upon this dynamic integrative experience.

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[22]Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 117.

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